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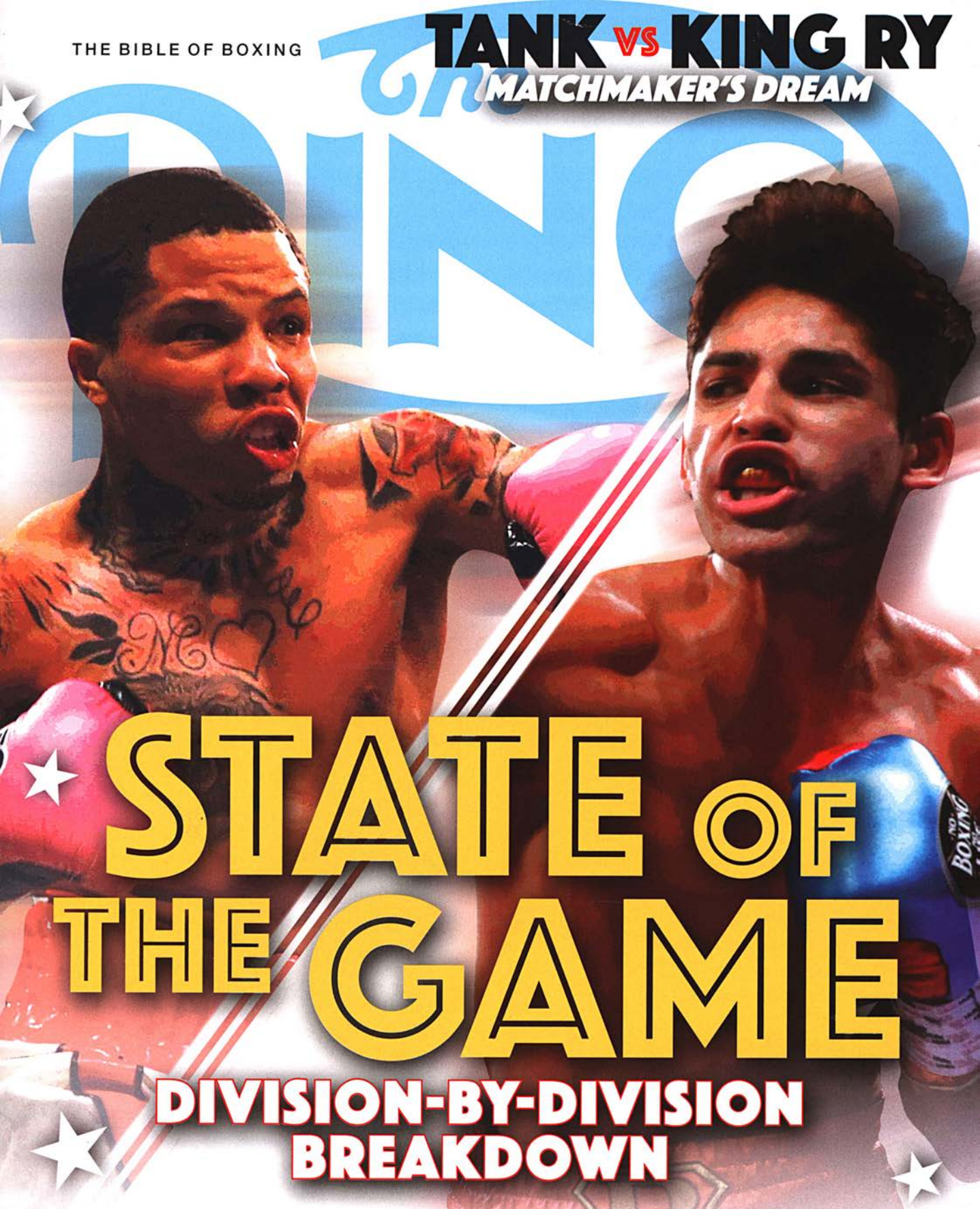

STATE OF THE GAME

DIVISION-BY-DIVISION BREAKDOWN

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Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez made his maiden defense of the WBC junior bantamweight title by blasting his way through the vastly more experienced and naturally larger Srisaket Sor Rungvisai in eight rounds.

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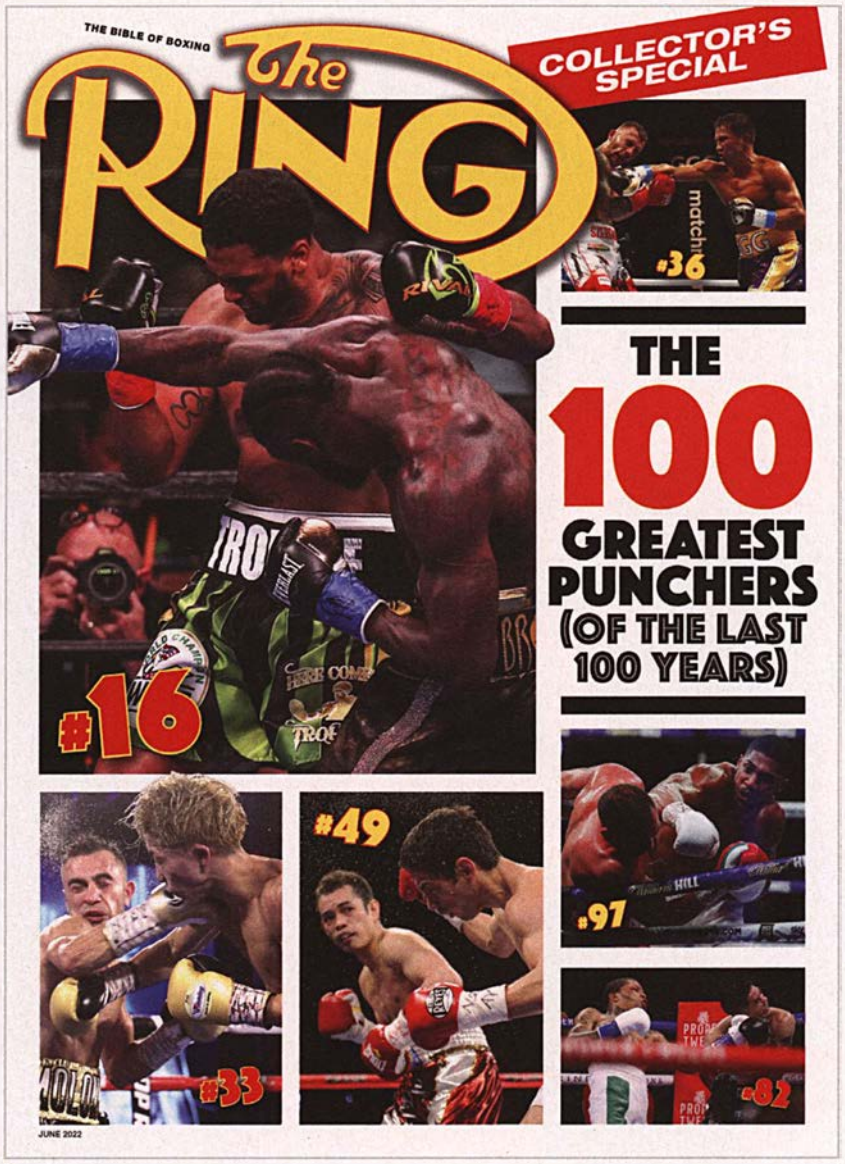

A HUNDRED AND ...

I really like how The Ring put together "The 100 Greatest Punchers of the Last 100 Years" in the June 2022 issue, but I was surprised that former two-time junior featherweight IBF world champion Steve Molitor, who is a good friend of mine, never made the list. Steve is a great puncher and he is an excellent counterpuncher who had an impressive professional record of 34-3 when he retired in 2012. If possible, I would like to see The Ring do a story on Steve at some point; that would be awesome. Also, you did a great job with the story on the Klitschko brothers in the July 2022 issue. Keep up the great work. Train hard, fight easy.

Justin "The Ninja" Ruhl
Toronto, Canada

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S RESPONSE: Thanks for the kind words on the June and July issues, Justin. I remember Molitor, an excellent boxer who competed well against top-level opposition. To my eyes, his bread and butter was his ring generalship. He was a very good puncher in terms of his technique, timing and variation, but as his 12 career KOs indicate, he wasn't exactly Wilfredo Gomez in the power department. But that's OK. Knockouts aren't everything. As you noted, Molitor won the IBF 122-pound belt twice. He made five defenses – against quality challengers – during his first reign, which began with a fifth-round KO of unbeaten Michael Hunter in the European champ's hometown of Hartlepool, England. Not too shabby! I can see The Ring (or RingTV.com) doing a 'Where Are They Now?' feature on Molitor, or including him in an article about notable fighters who were willing to travel to other countries on their way up the ranks. Molitor was unbeaten (3-0) in U.S. appearances and was 4-1 in UK visits (the lone loss to future champ and The Ring's 2016 Fighter of the Year, Carl Frampton).

Great reading "The 100 Greatest Punchers," but I was wondering why Jimmy Wilde didn't get a mention; he stopped 99 opponents in 131 wins, which for such a small fighter was incredible, in my opinion.

Jim Goddard

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S RESPONSE: Good question, Jim. When we updated the 100 Greatest Punchers of All-Time rankings that was originally published in the 2003 Ring Yearbook, we decided to limit the list to the last 100 years (1922-2022) to commemorate the magazine's centennial anniversary but also to include more modern-era fighters. Wilde, who only had one bout after 1922, was No. 3 (behind Joe Louis and Sam Langford) in the original rankings.

FIVE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

I see frequent comments and articles about questionable decisions in the sport of boxing all the time. These bad decisions do harm to the boxers and to the sport. In just about every issue of The Ring, there is mention made about such decisions. I boxed as an amateur myself for 12 years

Chris Byrd (here fighting Evander Holyfield) used a combination of boxing skills and fearlessness to succeed at heavyweight.

DAVID LEEDS

and had a total of 178 fights. I myself have been on the receiving end of more than a few such decisions. In amateur boxing, to combat these bad decisions from taking place, many years ago they started using five judges instead of three in regional and national championships, and in international and Olympic bouts. Each of my fights in which I felt that I was on the wrong end of a decision happened when my bout was being judged by three judges and not five.

By using five judges, it makes it more difficult for the judges to screw a decision up and harder for judges to cheat a fighter out of a decision. I think it's way past time for ALL professional bouts to have five judges scoring fights. The fans of the sport of boxing and the fighters themselves most certainly deserve to have their bouts judged in a manner that will produce more accurate results.

David Walrod
Missoula, Mont.

A RARE BYRD

With Roy Jones now inducted into the IBHOF, his greatest achievement is moving from middleweight to capturing the WBA heavyweight championship against John Ruiz. But what about Chris Byrd, who did essentially the same thing? Byrd won an Olympic silver medal at middleweight and then – unlike Jones, who was one and done – he became a two-time heavyweight champion, fighting the best heavyweights of his time. He won the WBO title by inflicting the first of only two losses against Vitali Klitschko. He lost to Wladimir, then won the vacant IBF title against a faded but still formidable Evander Holyfield. He also fought and beat David Tua, Jameel McCline and Fres Oquendo, and drew against Andrew Golota. Most impressively for me, though, is that at a time when everyone, including King Kong, was avoiding Ike Ibeabuchi, Byrd willingly stepped in against him. That he got stopped in five is immaterial; win, lose or draw, Byrd willingly took on a murderers row of heavyweights of the day. C'mon IBHOF, give Byrd some love.

Bradley Morris
Astoria, New York

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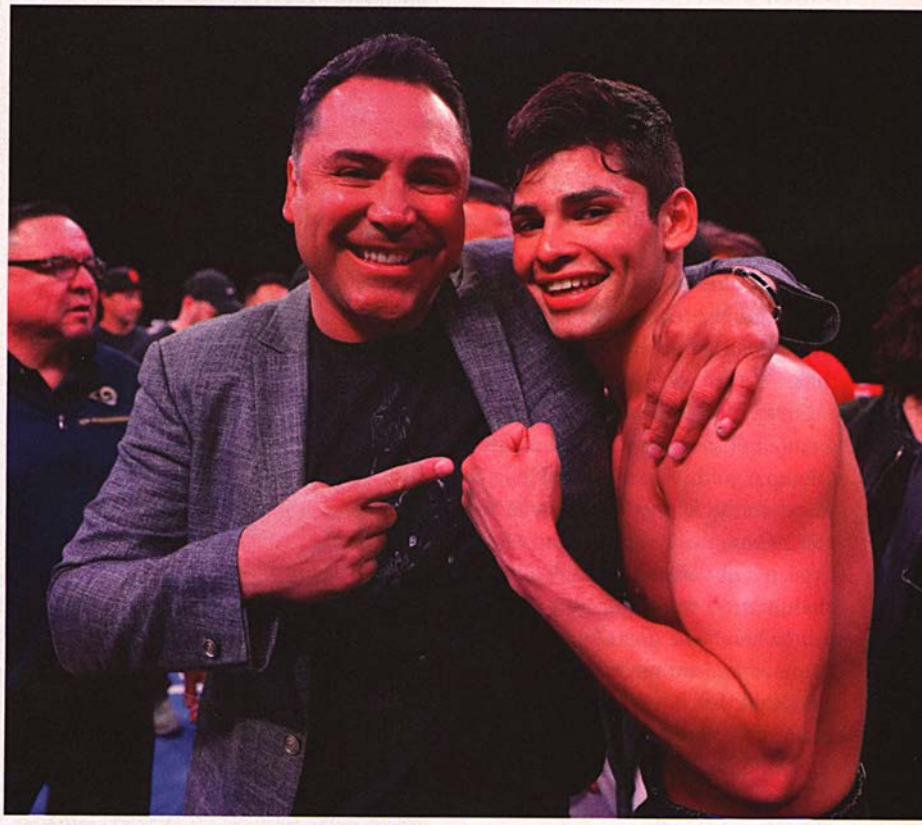
Brooklyn, NY 11209

THE RING (ISSN: 0035-5410), Vol. 101, NO. 10 (OCTOBER 2022), is published 12 times per year by Sports and Entertainment Publications, LLC, P.O. Box 90254 Brooklyn, NY 11209. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11209 and additional post offices. Postmasters: Send change of address notices to: The Ring Magazine Subscriber Service Dept., PO Box 16027, North Hollywood, CA 91615-6027, Phone: 818-286-3101; rngcs@magserv.com. Single copy price $8.95 in U.S.A. and Canada (£5.99 in the U.K.). Subscription price U.S. and possession $39.99 for 12 issues including Canada. Mexico add $5. All remaining countries add $10 for 12 issues per year. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2020 Sports and Entertainment Publications, LLC. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy of the content of advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: advertising@sepublications.com. U.S. / Canadian and International distribution by Comag Marketing Group LLC, 155 Village Blvd #200, Princeton, NJ 08540. UK distribution by Seymour Distribution Ltd., 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, England, EC1A 9PT. Printed In U.S.A.

THE GOLDEN BOY VERSUS KING RY



Ryan Garcia has Golden Boy star power, but can he be great?

In movie star terms, it's like comparing George Clooney to Jamie Dornan. Former heartthrob Clooney peaked in the 1990s, whereas Dornan is known for his portrayal of Mr. Grey (in Fifty Shades), the oversexed CEO who makes women swoon in the 2020s.

However, boxer comparisons are much more entertaining than movie star comparisons. And given that Oscar De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions represents Ryan Garcia, there is the overwhelming temptation to play "spot the difference" when it comes to their respective fighting careers.

De La Hoya had his day in the sun. A six-weight world champion blessed with Hollywood star looks and natural charisma, "The Golden Boy" was destined for stardom. But what made him even more popular was that he was willing to fight anyone, anywhere, anytime at any weight.

Garcia, like De La Hoya, is an exceptionally good-looking American of Mexican descent. The unbeaten lightweight star – or is it junior welterweight now? – has never walked into a room in his life. Garcia enters a room and makes heads turn. And despite the fact that his biggest moments are ahead of him, Garcia can also fight.

However, is it fair to put both men in the same sentence right now?

Recently, a boxing Twitter account sought to compare the 23-year-old Garcia to a 23-year-old version of De La Hoya. As expected, this debate drew the ire of hardcore fight fans who were aghast that non-champion Garcia could be compared to a multi-division champ and Hall of Famer.

At 23, De La Hoya was a three-weight world titleholder (130, 135 and 140 pounds) and he held wins over John John Molina, Rafael Ruelas, Genaro Hernandez and Miguel Angel Gonzalez. If that wasn't enough, De La Hoya won his third divisional title by stopping the legendary Julio Cesar Chavez in June 1996. It is no exaggeration to state that Oscar was Hall of Fame material before he turned 24 years old.

Garcia cannot compare with that type of career trajectory in 2022, and there are numerous reasons for that.

Firstly, despite being a decorated amateur star, Garcia did not capture Olympic gold. When De La Hoya stood on the winner's podium at the 1992 Games in Barcelona, he was expected to become a professional champion. It wasn't a case of "if" but "when." The great Sugar Ray Leonard had shown the way, and Top Rank followed a near-identical path in shaping Oscar's early career.

Garcia is 23-0 (19 KOs) and, at the same age, De La Hoya was 22-0 (20 KOs). Literally one fight and a 10-count apart. However, the sport has changed so much since those unforgettable Oscar nights. Team De La Hoya could secure matchups against Molina, Ruelas, Gonzalez and Chavez without breaking a sweat. Team Garcia doesn't have the same pull – yet.

Now, if you think Garcia doesn't want the big matchups, then you're dismissive of his mentality. Forget the good looks and colossal social media following; Garcia is a fighting man. He may have poured scorn on the importance of championship belts, and he's had his own demons to contend with, but "King Ry" dreams of facing the best. That is demonstrable.

Does he want to get paid? Absolutely! Does he want the best

De La Hoya's accomplishments matched his popularity.

STEPHEN DUNN

SYE WILLIAMS

Garcia has talent and desire, he just needs a big fight.

possible deal for himself? Of course he does! And all it will take is one superfight win for Garcia and he'll kick the door open to stardom. He has everything else in abundance. But it's securing that one superfight that's proving problematic.

De La Hoya began his career on network TV and transitioned seamlessly to cable giant HBO. After establishing himself as boxing's biggest star beneath the heavyweight division, he debuted as a pay-per-view attraction against Ruelas in May 1995. He remained a pay-per-view star for well over a decade and was boxing's biggest cash cow during his glory years and beyond.

Garcia's position is more complex. His fights are broadcast via streaming giant DAZN, but his big-name rivals have their own promoters and their own broadcasters. Gervonta Davis, for example, is aligned with Floyd Mayweather Promotions and Showtime, who have succeeded in developing "Tank" into a pay-per-view star on their own.

Rival promoters and broadcasters love to pull rank almost as much as fighters do – maybe more.

It's therefore unfair to compare a 23-year-old Garcia to a 23-year-old De La Hoya. Hell, it's unfair to compare any 23-year-old in today's game to that version of De La Hoya. The sport is more divided than ever and the pitfalls are even deeper.

The youngest male fighter on The Ring's pound-for-pound list is Japanese sensation Naoya Inoue, who is rated No. 1 as we go to press. Inoue is a three-weight world titleholder, but he's also 29 years old and a decade-long pro. "The Monster" waited a long time for pound-for-pound recognition.

Will we see Garcia in a superfight? I'd bet money on it. But I wouldn't bet against us waiting a little while longer.

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES +

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

BY TOM GRAY

JESSE RODRIGUEZ

Just 22 years old and already taking down elite opposition.

Jesse Rodriguez is coming off a career-best triumph. On June 25, at the Tech Port Arena in his hometown of San Antonio, Texas, the fighter known as "Bam" scored an eye-popping eighth-round stoppage of former Ring Magazine/WBC junior bantamweight champion Srisaket Sor Rungvisai. The official time was 1:50.

Rodriguez decked the Thai power puncher in the seventh round of their all-southpaw collision. As he'd done all night, the defending WBC 115-pound titleholder effortlessly created a punching angle and whipped home a sharp left hand. Only this time, the challenger's legs disobeyed him. When Sor Rungvisai rose, he wore the look of embarrassment and frustration across his beaten visage.

Beating Sor Rungvisai was one thing, but dropping and stopping him was a star-making triumph for "Bam."

His ordeal would be over in the very next round. Rodriguez closed out with an endless sequence of accurate combination punching in Round 8. Given the fact that Sor Rungvisai hadn't been stopped since 2009 – when "Bam" was just 9 years old – the respected veteran was given every chance to fire back by referee Mark Calo-oy.

He just couldn't do it.

Bam burst onto the scene with a convincing 12-round unanimous decision win over former titleholder Carlos Cuadras in February. The youngster stepped in at just one week's notice for a chance to pick up the vacant WBC title. And, if that's not enough, he came up two weight classes, from junior flyweight, to make it happen.

Fans love that type of audacity, and they also love activity. No sooner had Rodriguez dealt with Cuadras than he'd signed on for the hard-hitting Sor Rungvisai. With that job out of the way, Rodriguez will now get maximum exposure on the Canelo-Golovkin 3 undercard when he faces Mexico's Israel Gonzalez on Sept. 17.

Despite his incredible run at 115 pounds, it's highly likely that this exciting young champion will drop down to 112 and seek out more challenges in another menacing division.

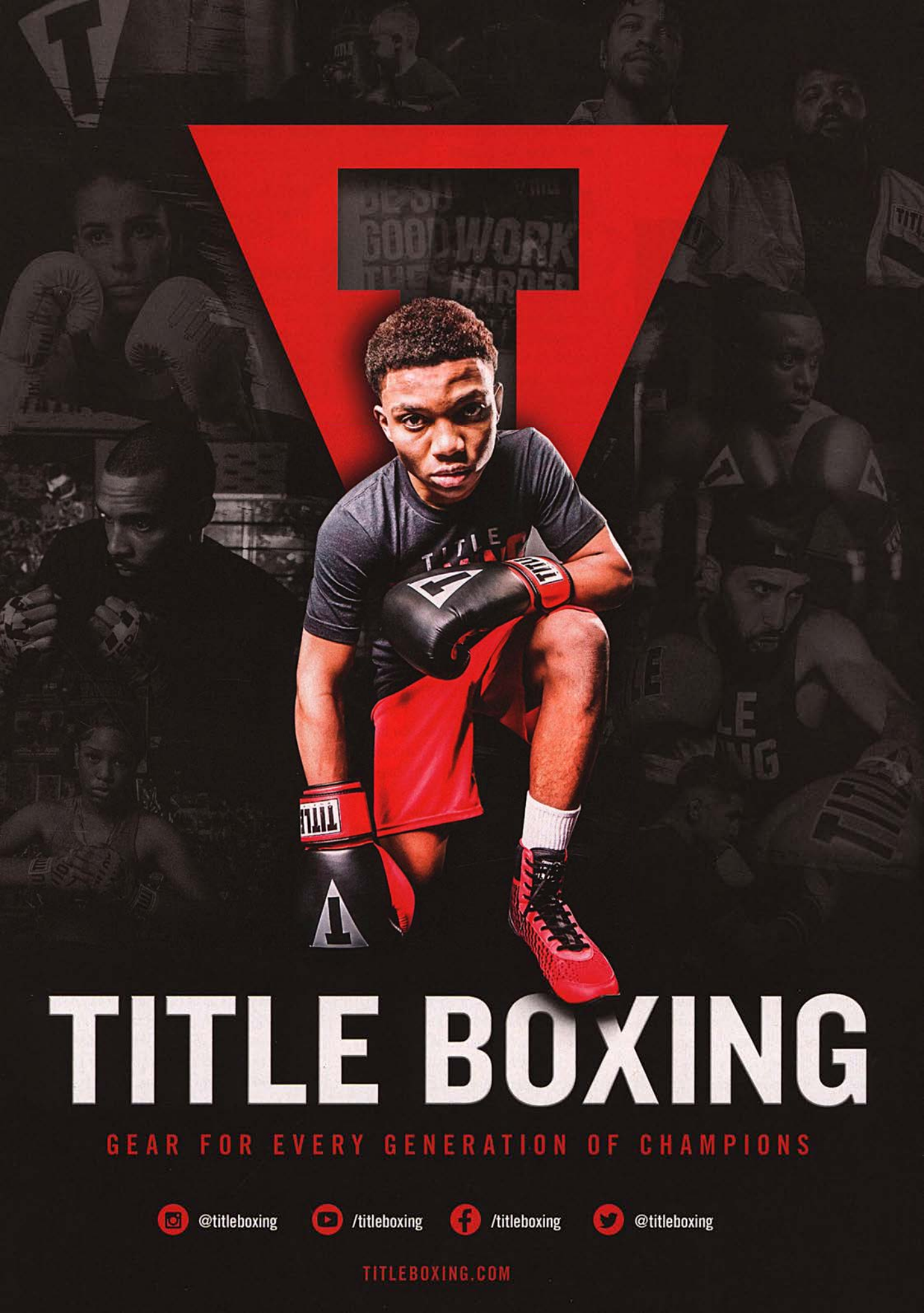
The legacy-driven Rodriguez predicts that Sor Rungvisai was just the beginning of some great things for him in this sport.

"My skills proved a point tonight," said Rodriguez after the fight. "My whole team knew what we're capable of. Coming into the fight, I knew I could not fight the way I did against Cuadras. I'm thankful for that fight because of the experience I gained.

"I grew up watching these guys. Being in the ring with them is a privilege in itself."

Whatever star quality is, "Bam" Rodriguez has it.

MELINA PIZANO/MATCHROOM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NEW FACES: SKYE NICOLSON

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

AGE: 27
HOMETOWN: Yatala, Queensland, Australia
WEIGHT CLASS: Featherweight
HEIGHT: 5-foot-5 ½ (166 cm)
AMATEUR RECORD: 107-33
TURNED PRO: 2022
PRO RECORD: 4-0
TRAINER: Eddie Lam
MANAGER: Paul Ready
PROMOTER: Matchroom Boxing
INSTAGRAM: @skyebnic

BEST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: In just her third fight as a professional, on April 30, Nicolson traveled to the iconic Madison Square Garden in New York City to face Shanecqua Davis on the Katie Taylor-Amanda Serrano undercard, and she fought like she was in her family's boxing gym back home in Yatala – calm, cool, collected and in control from start to finish. Nicolson also logged her first (and only) pro knockdown late in the sixth round, which drew a roar from a crowd that she won over the moment she walked to the ring wearing the jersey of the New York Rangers, who were in the midst of a solid NHL playoff run. "It must have been because I wore the jersey," Nicolson laughs. "They were my good luck charm for the fight."

WHY SHE'S A PROSPECT: There are prospects with championship potential and there are prospects with star potential. Nicolson is a prospect with both. She can fight, she's marketable, and she seems undaunted by anything having to do with either aspect of the sport.

"I love it," she said of being in the public eye, but the beautiful thing about Nicolson's ascent is that she's not chasing the attention or changing her personality along the way. She's class, through and through. She even shows up early for interviews.

"I have so many people that I come on Zoom to interview say that to me," Nicolson laughs. "They're like, 'Wow, you're the first fighter I've interviewed that hasn't been 10 minutes late.' I don't like being late. It's a pet peeve."

As for the most important part of the equation, Nicolson has an extensive amateur background, capped off with her appearance in the 2020 Olympic Games for Australia. She's an accurate puncher, and she's a fast learner. Compare her pro debut against Jessica Juarez to her June win over 26-fight veteran Gabriela Bouvier and it's night and day, as Nicolson is the rare fighter who is getting better with every fight.

Then there's her work ethic and ambition. Nicolson fought the first four fights of her pro career in just 91 days, with the Bouvier fight going the full eight-round distance. She's not going to cherry pick her way to a title; she's willing to fight her way there, and the sooner the better, as she expects to be in a championship fight by the tail end of 2023.

"I'm all about getting my name in the history books and creating history," she said.

WHY SHE'S A SUSPECT: Nicolson suffers from a lot of the ailments her peers do early in their careers, and many don't shake dropping their jab straight down after throwing it or keeping that jab hand down by their waist. Tommy Hearns could get away with that gunslinger pose – most can't do the same. Nicolson also doesn't have the one-punch stopping power to make up for defensive mistakes like going wide on throwing power shots, so she will have to evolve into a busy fighter with a tight guard to succeed. So far, no one has made her pay for any defensive holes, and she's clearly controlled each one of her fights, losing just one round on one judge's scorecard in her debut and none the rest of the way. The good thing is, these are all fixable issues, and, as noted earlier, Nicolson is improving with each fight. The bad thing is that if Matchroom pushes her too fast, THE champion waiting for her at 126 pounds is Amanda Serrano. In a year's time, Nicolson might take out featherweight titleholders Erika Cruz and/or Sarah Mahfoud, but Serrano would be too much to ask for.

STORYLINES: Nicolson had no intention of boxing until she was 12 years old, and that wasn't even with the goal of competing.

"When I was 12, I was getting a little bit on the chubby side and I was starting high school after the Christmas break," she said. "I started going into the gym – my [older] brother [Allan Jr.] was the coach in our family boxing gym – and I started going for self-confidence reasons more than anything to get fit. There were a bunch of boys my age starting at that time, so it was more of a little social thing."

Typical, right? Wrong. See, Nicolson wasn't just an average kid showing up to the gym. Her brother, Jamie, was one of Australia's top amateurs, representing the nation in the 1992 Olympics. Tragically, Skye never met Jamie, who died along with another brother, Gavin, in a car crash. Jamie was 22, Gavin was only 10. Skye was born a year later, and once she began boxing competitively and making a name for herself, the idea of winning an Olympic medal for her brother filled the newspapers Down Under. Nicolson didn't medal, making it to the quarterfinals, but her Olympic dream isn't over.

"I do feel an Olympic gold medal, to me, is the best achievement you can do in boxing," she said, explaining that a run at gold in 2024 is a possibility. "They have changed the qualifying process and it would probably mean stepping away from the pro scene for at least six months to go box in multiple tournaments as an amateur again. I'm going to keep taking my pro career one fight at a time and reevaluate and reassess where we're at in the second half of next year and decide what's going to be best for me and best for my career and what I really want."

Add in Nicolson's willingness to leave home to live and train in England, her growing popularity and her ambitious schedule, and there will be no shortage of things to talk about when it comes to this rising star.

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"SWEET CAROLINE" + KNOCKOUT PUNCHES THAT WEREN'T

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

Boxing fans have heard "Sweet Caroline" a lot lately. It's played just before the main event at all Matchroom Boxing fight cards. When Tyson Fury fought Dillian Whyte for Queensberry Promotions in front of 94,000 screaming fans at Wembley Stadium, "Sweet Caroline" was an integral part of the pageantry. The song has become a universal sports anthem, which is counterintuitive since the lyrics have absolutely nothing to do with sports.

"Sweet Caroline" was written and first sung by Neil Diamond in 1969. It was a good year for music. The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Doors, The 5th Dimension, Elvis Presley, Stevie Wonder, Bob Dylan, Glen Campbell, Johnny Cash, Kenny Rogers and Simon & Garfunkel were all on the best-seller charts. Motown was in full bloom. 1969 was also the year that Frank Sinatra recorded "My Way."

"Sweet Caroline" climbed to No. 4 on the Billboard Hot 100 list. Four decades later, before singing the song at a 50th birthday party for Caroline Kennedy, Diamond maintained that he'd been inspired to write it by an old magazine photo of the former president's daughter. Then, in 2014, he abandoned that fiction and said he'd written it for Marsha Murphy (his wife in 1969) but that he'd needed a three-syllable name to go with the melody.

Music has been part of modern sporting events since 1887 when Notre Dame played Michigan in football and the Fighting Irish band attended the game. Since then, sports musical traditions have permutated and grown.

"Sweet Caroline" entered the realm of mainstream sports in 1996 when the NFL Carolina Panthers began playing it at home games – a practice that has continued in Charlotte ever since. The Boston Red Sox first played it at Fenway Park in 1997. A Red Sox employee named Amy Tobey (who was responsible for ballpark music) aired it over the public address system for a friend who'd just given birth to a baby named Caroline. Thereafter, it was played sporadically at Fenway Park until 2002, when it became a permanent part of the soundtrack during the eighth inning of all home games. After the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, Neil Diamond journeyed to Boston and led the crowd at Fenway Park in singing the song.

Over the years, numerous college bands have incorporated "Sweet Caroline" in their song rotation. The Northern Ireland national soccer team played it during a post-match celebration after beating England in 2005 and has played it at home games ever since.

The tradition has now spread its wings. Earlier this year, hundreds of thousands of people sang "Sweet Caroline" at the NFL draft in Las Vegas.

The playing of "Sweet Caroline" constitutes a feel-good moment. Like most shared music, it fosters a sense of belonging to a group. And the crowd becomes part of the drama, making its own contribution to the lyrics:

Hands, touching hands
Reaching out, touching me, touching you
Sweet Caroline
Whoa-oh-oh!
Good times never seemed so good –
So good! So good! So good!

For those on-site, the experience is akin to the bonding power of Michael Buffer's "Let's get ready to rumble." So let's give the final word on "Sweet Caroline" to the great man himself.

"I love it," Buffer says. "When that song is played, it turns the fans on and lets them know that what they've been waiting for is here. I make a living getting the crowd up for the main event, so I appreciate what it does. Anything that gets the crowd going like that is good."

★★★

A handful of knockout punches have mythic status. The crushing right hand that Rocky Marciano landed on Jersey Joe Walcott's jaw to claim the heavyweight crown and the picture-perfect left hook from Sugar Ray Robinson that dethroned Gene Fullmer are at the top of most lists. But the flip side of the coin is equally compelling – knockout punches that weren't.

I'm talking about punches that landed with devastating impact. Moments when a fight appeared to be over. But not only did the debilitated fighter survive, he rallied to win. Tens of thousands of fighters have gotten off the canvas to triumph. I'm talking about fights where the fight looked to be over but wasn't.

These moments have played out with particular drama in the heavyweight division. Here are some historically significant heavyweight fights where a fighter suffered a crushing knockdown but managed to survive and prevail.

On September 14, 1923, Jack Dempsey engaged in one of boxing's most storied slugfests against Luis Angel Firpo. Firpo was down seven times in the first round. Then, late in

Tyson Fury enjoys a song almost as much as a fight.

the stanza, he unleashed a hellacious right hand that knocked Dempsey through the ropes into the press section. Adding injury to insult, Dempsey suffered a cut when the back of his head hit a typewriter. But landing in the press section was a blessing. Fighters were allowed 20 seconds to make their way back into the ring if they were knocked out of it. Helped by reporters, Dempsey returned in 14 seconds. In the second round, he knocked Firpo out.

Four years later, Dempsey was on the opposite side of the equation. Seeking vindication after losing his title by decision to Gene Tunney, The Manassa Mauler drove The Fighting Marine to the canvas with a barrage of punches in Round 7 of their historic rematch,. But instead of going to a neutral corner as required by the rules, he stood over Tunney, delaying referee Dave Barry's count by five seconds. That gave Tunney extra time to regain his senses. He rose at the count of nine (after being on the canvas for 14 seconds) and outboxed Dempsey the rest of the way en route to a unanimous-decision triumph.

Cassius Clay (his name at the time) was coasting against Henry Cooper in their June 18, 1963, match in London. He'd predicted a fifth-round knockout and was doing as he pleased, toying with Cooper to make good on his prediction. Then, as Round 4 reached an end, Cooper unleashed "Enry's 'Ammer" – a devastating left hook that landed flush on the jaw and deposited Clay on the canvas. Cassius rose, dazed and on wobbly legs, and was saved by the bell. With time to recover, he stopped Cooper on cuts in the following round.

George Foreman vs. Ron Lyle (January 24, 1976) made Rocky vs. Apollo Creed look dull. Each man visited the canvas twice and appeared to be toast on multiple occasions – particularly Foreman, who crumpled to the canvas at the end of Round 4 and was staggered again and again in Round 5. Then, improbably, Foreman backed Lyle into a corner and pummeled him until Lyle fell and was counted out at 2:28 of the fifth stanza.

Firpo vs. Dempsey was immortalized by artist George Bellows.

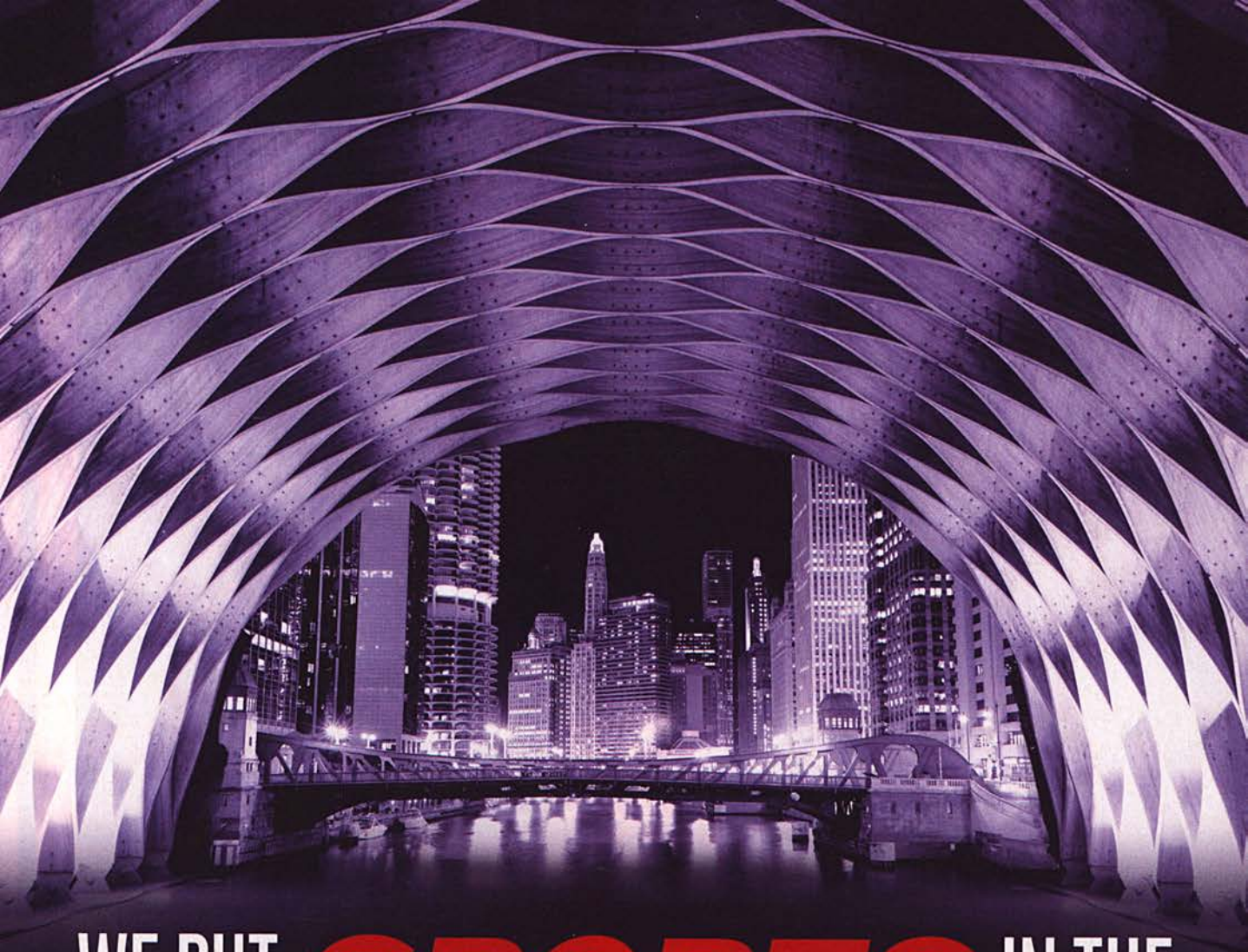
Larry Holmes came back from oblivion twice in title defenses. After dominating Earnie Shavers for six rounds in their September 28, 1979, encounter, The Easton Assassin was floored in Round 7 by a crushing overhand right. He hit the canvas with a thud, managed to get up, survived the next 40 seconds and stopped Shavers in the 11th round. Two years later – on November 6, 1981 – Holmes did it again, this time against Renaldo Snipes. Less than a minute into Round 7, Snipes dropped Holmes with a monstrous right hand. Larry got up and staggered face-first into a turnbuckle. But he survived and stopped Snipes in the 11th round.

Buster Douglas controlled Mike Tyson for seven rounds and 55 seconds of their February 11, 1990, fight in Tokyo. Then, with five seconds left in Round 8, he got sloppy. BOOM! A right uppercut deposited Buster on the canvas. He rose at the count of nine, looking very much like a fighter who wouldn't last long in Round 9. Wrong! Douglas regained control of the fight and put Tyson down for the count in the 10th stanza.

More recently, on April 29, 2017, Anthony Joshua survived exhaustion and a sixth-round knockdown to stop Wladimir Klitschko in 11 rounds. And on December 1, 2018, Tyson Fury, who appeared to be down for the count, got up from the canvas in Round 12 against Deontay Wilder to salvage a draw that was almost as good as a win.

In boxing, it ain't over till it's over.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Broken Dreams: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for boxing's highest honor – induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.



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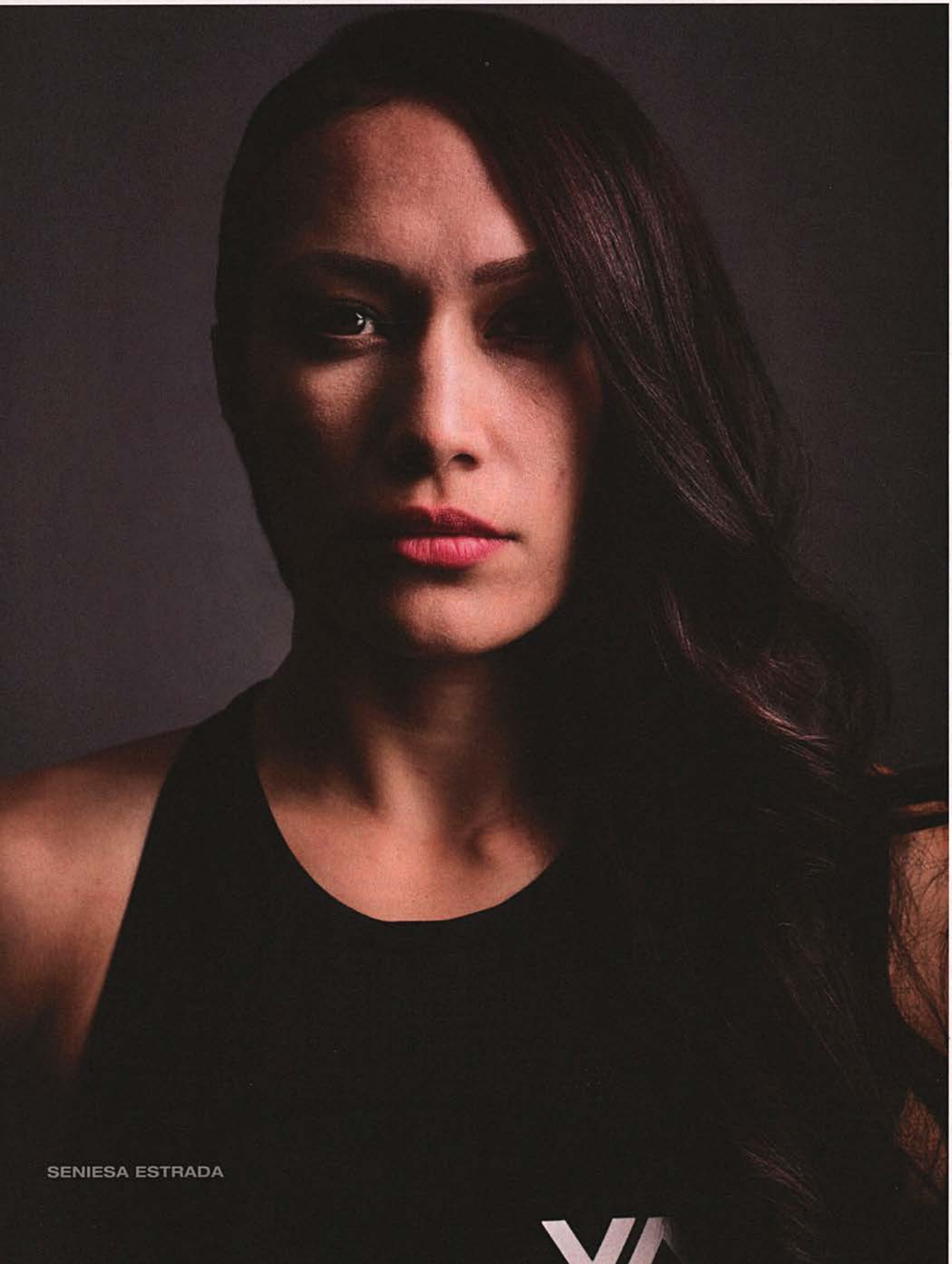
WOMEN WARRIORS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK** • TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**



SENIESA ESTRADA

© WOJTEK URBANEK

THE FACE OF BOXING

Women's boxing took a giant leap forward earlier this year when Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano squared off in a fight for the ages. The three women on these pages represent different aspects of the women's boxing experience.

Christy Martin is boxing royalty. After turning pro in 1989, she fought in obscurity for seven years, mostly on small club-fight cards. Then she signed with Don King, who began putting her on the undercard of big fights. On March 16, 1996, King matched Martin against Deirdre Gogarty on the undercard of Mike Tyson vs. Frank Bruno in Las Vegas. Martin slugged her way to a unanimous-decision triumph and, less than a month later, was on the cover of Sports Illustrated.

Martin wasn't a great fighter, but she was an exciting one. Her defense was porous, but she could punch. Hard. She retired in 2012 after a 21-year career that saw her compile a 49-7-3 (32 KOs, 2 KOs by) ring record. In 2020, in acknowledgement of the role that she played in popularizing women's boxing, she was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

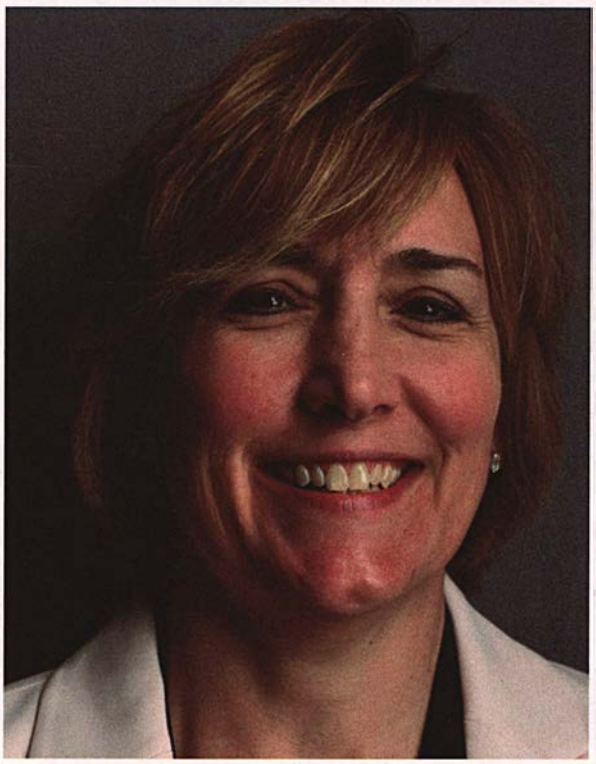
Thirty-eight-year-old Vanessa Bradford is at the other end of the spectrum. Bradford has had 10 fights in a 12-year career, winning five with no knockouts either way. She's an opponent who gives an honest effort every time out but has a limited horizon in boxing.

For Seniesa Estrada, the sky is the limit. Estrada, a 30-year-old Los Angeles native, has won all 22 of her fights to date and is the current WBA 105-pound beltholder. She represents a new generation of women boxers. Women who are better conditioned and whose skills as a group are more polished than those of their predecessors.

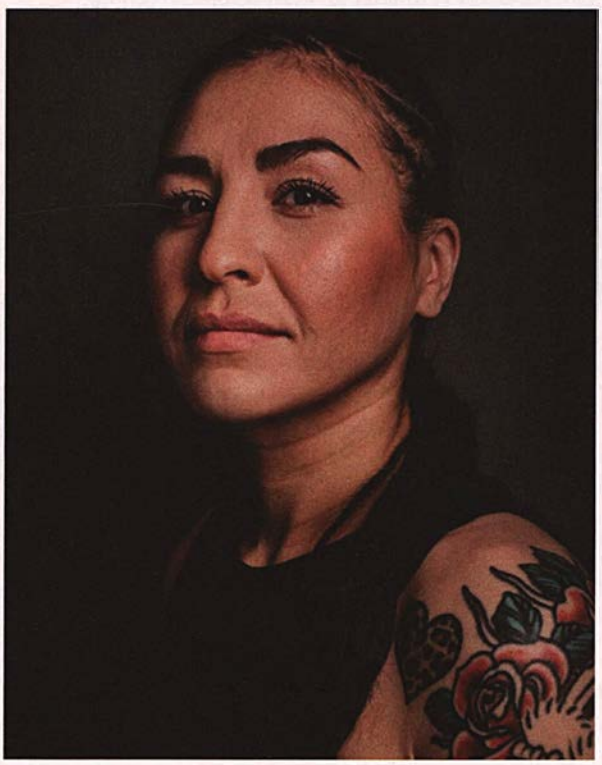
"I'm the artist. Here is the warrior in front of me," Wojtek Urbanek says of photographing these fighters. "And it defies stereotypes because the warrior is a woman. It's different from what we were brought up to think. But it's the future. And when you accept that, the difference between photographing women boxers and photographing men boxers is minimal.

"When I photograph women who are actors or models," Urbanek continues, "I hear all the time 'This is my best side. Please photograph me from this angle.' I never hear that from a woman boxer. Some of the woman boxers pay a little more attention to their appearance than the men. When I photographed Cecilia Braekhus, she took one look at my equipment and said, 'Wait a minute. I want to freshen up.' Then she went into the ladies' room. And when she came back, her hair and makeup were perfect (see the December 2019 issue of The Ring). But that was the exception."

Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.



CHRISTY MARTIN



VANESSA BRADFORD

RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of July 23, 2022

ABOVE: NAOKI FUKADA: THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

HEAVYWEIGHT: Joe Joyce capped his win over Christian Hammer with a left to the gut in Round 4, but the Londoner got hit too many times along the way for at least one member of the Ratings Panel. It was, as he put it, an "impressive result, but when you see the fight it looks less so." Joyce remained ranked at No. 8.

CRUISERWEIGHT: Position shifts for this period mainly took place in the lower half of the ratings, but one tectonic-level event did occur at 200 pounds. Jai Opetaia – unrated last month, only fights in Australia, no major names on his resume before July 2 – took on Ring/IBF champion Mairis Briedis, whose only loss was a pardonable majority decision against Oleksandr Usyk in 2018, and beat him. And yes it took place in Australia, but no it wasn't home cooking. Opetaia busted Briedis' nose in the fourth and outboxed him for the majority of rounds before surviving a late rally from the Latvian to win a unanimous decision. To throw major fortitude into the equation, Opetaia did it all with a jaw that got cracked as early as the second round and continued to worsen; scans later revealed a mandible that was essentially severed on both sides.

Opetaia's victory will forever be a prominent stop on the timeline of Australian boxing. His arrival on the list pushed everyone downward, forcing No. 10-rated Noel Gevor out, and Briedis dropped to No. 2.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Canada's still-undefeated Erik Bazinyan (No. 9 last month) gained a rank and further increased his stock with a generously wide unanimous decision over Marcelo Coceres in Montreal.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Israel Madrimov (No. 8) seemed to be building momentum against Michel Soro (No. 9) at the end of the second round in London's O2 Arena, but the fight ended just seconds into the third after a collision of heads left blood pouring from a gash on Soro's eyebrow. The result was a technical draw.

Magomed Kurbanov (No. 6) also stayed put with a unanimous decision over Patrick Teixeira, who held the WBO title by default during the peak of the COVID shutdowns but has since lost three in a row.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: Arnold Barboza (No. 6) ended an 11-month layoff with a unanimous decision over Danielito Zorrilla.

LIGHTWEIGHT: In his second fight at 140, Ryan Garcia rolled over Javier Fortuna in six rounds, scoring three knockdowns with three left hooks (one to the body and two upstairs), but for now he stays ranked No. 5 at lightweight. Fortuna (No. 9 last month) dropped off the list and Frank Martin moved in at No. 10.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Already a titleholder with five defenses at 122 pounds, Rey Vargas (unrated last month) is now wearing a belt at 126 after a split decision over WBC incumbent Mark Magsayo in San Antonio. Both went into the fight undefeated and chances looked good for Magsayo to remain that way after scoring a knockdown with a short right to jaw in Round 9. But Vargas used his height advantage well to foil Magsayo's defense of the title he won by taking Gary Russell Jr.'s "0" in January – which is not to say there weren't plenty of aggressive, up-close exchanges. Vargas popped onto the list at No. 2, ousting No. 10-rated Joet Gonzalez, while Magsayo held his position at No. 3.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT: A gutsy Ronny Rios (No. 8 last month) weathered a deflating body punch and follow-up cranial attack from Murodjon Akhmadaliev in the fourth round, but the full complement of pinpoint counters and heavy, multi-level combos Rios was facing inevitably took a toll. The southpaw from Uzbekistan bent Rios with a left to the body in Round 12 and dropped him soon after, and the TKO was declared by referee Rafael Ramos a few loaded-up power shots later. Akhmadaliev held onto his two belts and No. 2 rating with the victory, while Rios slipped to No. 10.

Ryan Garcia was too quick and too powerful for Javier Fortuna.

Following his disappointing loss to Stephen Fulton (No. 1) last November, Brandon Figueroa (No. 3 last month) moved up and notched a sixth-round stoppage of Carlos Castro at featherweight, creating room at No. 10 for former bantamweight titleholder Zolani Tete. Tete had made his debut at the weight on the previous weekend with a fourth-round knockout of Jason Cunningham in London.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: Temporarily setting aside The Ring's "junior" style in honor of a super fly phenom, Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez was stellar in his eighth-round stoppage of Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, controlling his fellow southpaw with a youthful mix of agility and power, beating the Thai power-puncher up and putting him down with a crossing left hook in Round 7. Rodriguez rose from No. 6 to No. 3 in the ratings as a result – another star from a division that never fails to deliver. If only two guys who could stand side-by-side on a scale and equal one Deontay Wilder could make half the heavyweight's salary.

It's unclear where this leaves Sor Rungvisai, who dropped from No. 1 to No. 6, but the 57-fight veteran's journey from poverty to Madison Square Garden remains one of the most inspiring boxing stories in recent memory, even if it was at the expense of a beloved former pound-for-pound king from Nicaragua.

Kazuto Ioka (No. 2) handily outpointed Donnie Nietes (No. 9 last month) to defend his WBO

Jai Opetaia (left) broke free of the cruiserweight pack by dethroning Ring champion Mairis Briedis, who dropped to No. 2 at 200 pounds.

JOHN MCCOY

title and avenge one of the two blemishes on his record. He also ended Nietes' unbeaten streak (there were a few draws), which astonishingly stretched all the way back to 2004. The Filipino veteran, who is a former Ring champion at junior flyweight and has held titles in four divisions overall, is now 40 and says he'll fight on. He dropped off the list, though, and the Ratings Panel decided to bring in Kosei Tanaka at No. 9 to fill the void. Tanaka's only loss was to Ioka on New Year's Eve in 2020.

FLYWEIGHT: David Jimenez (unrated last month) finished strong to take a majority decision over Ricardo Sandoval (No. 5 at the time) in Los Angeles. Sandoval dropped to No. 8 and Jimenez entered at No. 7, but the man to leave the list was No. 6-rated Moruti Mthalane, who hasn't fought since April 2021.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: Jesse Rodriguez had been rated here as well, at No. 3, so he was removed to make room for Hector Flores Calixto at No. 10. That same week, Hekkie Buddler went from No. 5 to No. 3 after snatching a points victory over No. 4-rated Elwin Soto with a 12th-round knockdown in Mexico. Also, Jonathan Gonzalez protected his WBO title and No. 2 ranking with a unanimous decision over Mark Anthony Barriga.

The following week, Shokichi Iwata replaced Calixto at No. 10 after a unanimous decision over Kenichi Horikawa, who has been fighting professionally since 2000 but still represents a worthy test, just as he did for Akira Yaegashi and Kenshiro Teraji early in their careers.

Daniel Matellon (No. 6) stayed busy in Panama with a third-round knockout of Ivan Garcia Carrillo.

STRAWWEIGHT: In his second defense, Rene Mark Cuarto (No. 6 last month) lost the IBF title via split decision to underdog Daniel Valladares in Mexico – 12 rounds in which heads knocked repeatedly and the ringside doctor visited the ropes often. Cuarto slipped a rank and Valladares entered at No. 6, pushing Vic Saludar out of the list.

Ginjiro Shigeoka (No. 9 last month) climbed to No. 8 after overwhelming and stopping Naoya Haruguchi (unrated) in the fourth round. On the same card, Ginjiro's older brother Yudai decked Cris Ganoza (also unrated) with a body shot in Round 3 and returned to the ratings at No. 10, replacing Erick Rosa.

Finally, the "three-way Thai" at the top of the division was partially broken by the much-anticipated matchup between WBA titleholder Knockout CP Freshmart (No. 1 last month) and Wanheng Menayothin (No. 3 last month). It ended with a unanimous decision in favor of Knockout and Menayothin slipped to No. 4, which means that only a Freshmart free-for-all involving WBC titleholder Petchmanee CP Freshmart (No. 2) stands between us and the first Ring champion at strawweight.

P4P

1	**NAOYA INOUE**	Japan • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
2	**OLEKSANDR USYK**	Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
3	**TERENCE CRAWFORD**	U.S. • 38-0-0 (29 KOs)
4	**ERROL SPENCE JR.**	U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
5	**CANELO ALVAREZ**	Mexico • 57-2-2 (39 KOs)
6	**VASILIY LOMACHENKO**	Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
7	**DMITRY BIVOL**	Russia • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)
8	**JOSH TAYLOR**	U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
9	**JERMELL CHARLO**	U.S. • 35-1-1 (19 KOs)
10	**ARTUR BETERBIEV**	Russia • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C	**TYSON FURY** RING, WBC	U.K. • 32-0-1 (23 KOs)
1	**OLEKSANDR USYK** IBF, WBA, WBO	Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
2	**ANTHONY JOSHUA**	U.K. • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
3	**DEONTAY WILDER**	U.S. • 42-2-1 (41 KOs)
4	**JOSEPH PARKER**	New Zealand • 30-2-0 (21 KOs)
5	**DILLIAN WHYTE**	U.K. • 28-3-0 (19 KOs)
6	**ANDY RUIZ JR.**	U.S. • 34-2-0 (22 KOs)
7	**LUIS ORTIZ**	Cuba • 33-2-0 (28 KOs)
8	**JOE JOYCE**	U.K. • 14-0-0 (13 KOs)
9	**FILIP HRGOVIC**	Croatia • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
10	**FRANK SANCHEZ**	Cuba • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C	**JAI OPETAIA** RING, IBF	Australia • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
1	**LAWRENCE OKOLIE** WBO	U.K. • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
2	**MAIRIS BRIEDIS**	Latvia • 28-2-0 (20 KOs)
3	**YUNIEL DORTICOS**	Cuba • 25-2-0 (23 KOs)
4	**ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC	Congo • 29-2-0 (25 KOs)
5	**THABISO MCHUNU**	S. Africa • 23-6-0 (13 KOs)
6	**ALEKSEI PAPIN**	Russia • 14-1-0 (13 KOs)
7	**RICHARD RIAKPORHE**	U.K. • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
8	**MATEUSZ MASTERNAK**	Poland • 46-5-0 (31 KOs)
9	**CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH**	U.K. • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
10	**RYAD MERHY**	Belgium • 30-1-0 (25 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**DMITRY BIVOL** WBA	Russia • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)
2	**ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC, WBO	Russia • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
3	**GILBERTO RAMIREZ**	Mexico • 44-0-0 (30 KOs)
4	**CALLUM SMITH**	U.K. • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
5	**MARCUS BROWNE**	U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
6	**JOE SMITH JR.**	U.S. • 28-4-0 (22 KOs)
7	**JOSHUA BUATSI**	U.K. • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
8	**ANTHONY YARDE**	U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
9	**MATHIEU BAUDERLIQUE**	France • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)
10	**JEAN PASCAL**	Canada • 36-6-1 (20 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	**CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO	Mexico • 57-2-2 (39 KOs)
1	**DAVID BENAVIDEZ**	U.S. • 26-0-0 (23 KOs)
2	**CALEB PLANT**	U.S. • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)
3	**ANTHONY DIRRELL**	U.S. • 34-2-2 (25 KOs)
4	**JOHN RYDER**	U.K. • 31-5-0 (17 KOs)
5	**CHRISTIAN MBILLI**	France • 21-0-0 (19 KOs)
6	**ZACH PARKER**	U.K. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
7	**DAVID MORRELL**	Cuba • 7-0-0 (6 KOs)
8	**ERIK BAZINYAN**	Canada • 28-0-0 (21 KOs)
9	**LERRONE RICHARDS**	U.K. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)
10	**VLADIMIR SHISHKIN**	Russia • 13-0-0 (8 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of July 23, 2022

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF, WBA
  Kazakhstan • 42-1-1 (37 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 31-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 40-0-0 (32 KOs)
- **5** **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **6** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 32-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **7** **RYOTA MURATA**
  Japan • 16-3-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **CARLOS ADAMES**
  Dom. Rep. • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

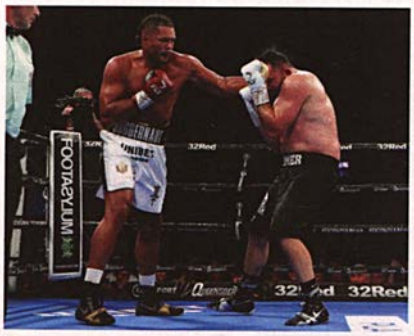
- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 35-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **1** **BRIAN CASTANO**
  Argentina • 17-1-2 (12 KOs)
- **2** **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 19-0-1 (13 KOs)
- **3** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 29-3-1 (21 KOs)
- **5** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **6** **MAGOMED KURBANOV**
  Russia • 23-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **7** **LIAM SMITH**
  U.K. • 31-3-1 (18 KOs)
- **8** **ISRAIL MADRIMOV**
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-1 (6 KOs)
- **9** **MICHEL SORO**
  France • 35-3-2 (24 KOs)
- **10** **CARLOS OCAMPO**
  Mexico • 34-1-0 (22 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 38-0-0 (29 KOs)
- **3** **JARON ENNIS**
  U.S. • 29-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **4** **YORDENIS UGAS**
  Cuba • 27-5-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
  Lithuania • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **KEITH THURMAN**
  U.S. • 30-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **8** **DAVID AVANESYAN**
  Russia • 29-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **9** **CONOR BENN**
  U.K. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **RADZHAB BUTAEV**
  Russia • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBO
  U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 27-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **2** **JOSE RAMIREZ**
  U.S. • 27-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 35-2-0 (27 KOs)
- **4** **JACK CATTERALL**
  U.K. • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
  Puerto Rico • 18-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **7** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **8** **BATYR AKHMEDOV**
  Russia • 9-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **9** **GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **SANDOR MARTIN**
  Spain • 40-2-0 (13 KOs)



Heavyweight contender Joe Joyce hammers Christian Hammer.

Frank Martin (right) stopped Jackson Marinez, but it was Fortuna's exit from the 135-pound ratings that saw Martin enter at No. 10.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **DEVIN HANEY** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 28-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **1** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
  Australia • 20-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
  U.S. • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **GERVONTA DAVIS**
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **5** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 23-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **6** **ISAAC CRUZ**
  Mexico • 23-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **7** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  U.S. • 32-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **8** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 30-4-0 (27 KOs)
- **9** **WILLIAM ZEPEDA**
  Mexico • 26-0-0 (23 KOs)
- **10** **FRANK MARTIN**
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- **C** **SHAKUR STEVENSON** RING, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **OSCAR VALDEZ**
  Mexico • 30-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **2** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 16-0-1 (13 KOs)
- **3** **ROGER GUTIERREZ** WBA
  Venezuela • 26-3-1 (20 KOs)
- **4** **ROBSON CONCEICAO**
  Brazil • 17-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **5** **JOE CORDINA** IBF
  U.K. • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **6** **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER**
  U.S. • 19-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **7** **HECTOR GARCIA**
  Dom. Rep. • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **8** **KENICHI OGAWA**
  Japan • 26-2-1 (18 KOs)
- **9** **SAMIR ZIANI**
  France • 33-3-1 (8 KOs)
- **10** **EDUARDO RAMIREZ**
  Mexico • 27-2-3 (12 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 35-1-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **REY VARGAS** WBC
  Mexico • 36-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **MARK MAGSAYO**
  Phil. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **4** **MAURICIO LARA**
  Mexico • 24-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **JOSH WARRINGTON** IBF
  U.K. • 31-1-1 (8 KOs)
- **6** **LEIGH WOOD**
  U.K. • 26-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **7** **GARY RUSSELL JR.**
  U.S. • 31-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **8** **KIKO MARTINEZ**
  Spain • 43-11-2 (30 KOs)
- **9** **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 28-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **10** **ROBEISY RAMIREZ**
  Cuba • 10-1-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **STEPHEN FULTON** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 11-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **3** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 29-4-1 (10 KOs)
- **4** **ANGELO LEO**
  U.S. • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **5** **RA'EESE ALEEM**
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **6** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 21-3-0 (17 KOs)
- **7** **MARLON TAPALES**
  Phil. • 36-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **8** **LUIS NERY**
  Mexico • 32-1-0 (24 KOs)
- **9** **RONNY RIOS**
  U.S. • 33-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **ZOLANI TETE**
  S. Africa • 30-4-0 (23 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of July 23, 2022

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC — Japan • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **1** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** — Phil. • 31-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **JASON MOLONEY** — Australia • 24-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **3** **NONITO DONAIRE** — Phil. • 42-7-0 (28 KOs)
- **4** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ** — Puerto Rico • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **RAU'SHEE WARREN** — U.S. • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **6** **GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL** — U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **LEE MCGREGOR** — U.K. • 11-0-1 (9 KOs)
- **8** **VINCENT ASTROLABIO** — Phil. • 17-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **9** **PAUL BUTLER** WBO — U.K. • 34-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **ALEJANDRO SANTIAGO** — Mexico • 25-3-5 (13 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING — Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **1** **ROMAN GONZALEZ** — Nicaragua • 51-3-0 (41 KOs)
- **2** **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO — Japan • 29-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **3** **JESSE RODRIGUEZ** WBC — Mexico • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **FERNANDO MARTINEZ** IBF — Argentina • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **5** **JOSHUA FRANCO** WBA — U.S. • 18-1-2 (8 KOs)
- **6** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI** — Thailand • 50-6-1 (43 KOs)
- **7** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.** — Mexico • 36-5-1 (25 KOs)
- **8** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** — Phil. • 33-2-2 (22 KOs)
- **9** **KOSEI TANAKA** — Japan • 17-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **ANDREW MOLONEY** — Australia • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO — Japan • 23-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **2** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC — Mexico • 18-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **3** **SUNNY EDWARDS** IBF — U.K. • 18-0-0 (4 KOs)
- **4** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA — Ukraine • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **5** **ANGEL AYALA LARDIZABAL** — Mexico • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **6** **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO** — Puerto Rico • 21-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **7** **DAVID JIMENEZ** — Costa Rica • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **RICARDO SANDOVAL** — U.S. • 20-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **9** **JACKSON CHAUKE** — S. Africa • 20-1-2 (14 KOs)
- **10** **FELIX ALVARADO** — Nicaragua • 38-2-0 (33 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA — Japan • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **1** **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC — Japan • 19-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **2** **JONATHAN GONZALEZ** WBO — Puerto Rico • 26-3-1 (14 KOs)
- **3** **HEKKIE BUDLER** — S. Africa • 34-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **4** **ELWIN SOTO** — Mexico • 19-3-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **MASAMICHI YABUKI** — Japan • 13-4-0 (12 KOs)
- **6** **DANIEL MATELLON** — Cuba • 13-0-2 (7 KOs)
- **7** **SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA** — S. Africa • 10-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **ESTEBAN BERMUDEZ** — Mexico • 14-4-2 (10 KOs)
- **9** **CARLOS CANIZALES** — Venezuela • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)
- **10** **SHOKICHI IWATA** — Japan • 9-0-0 (6 KOs)

Rey Vargas debuted at 126 pounds in the No. 2 spot after dethroning WBC titleholder Mark Magsayo, who fell to No. 3.

Kazuto Ioka successfully defended his 115-pound title against Donnie Nietes, who was beaten for the first time since 2004.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA — Thailand • 24-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC — Thailand • 38-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **MASATAKA TANIGUCHI** WBO — Japan • 16-3-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN** — Thailand • 55-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **5** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** — Puerto Rico • 17-2-0 (6 KOs)
- **6** **DANIEL VALLADARES** IBF — Mexico • 26-3-1 (15 KOs)
- **7** **RENE MARK CUARTO** — Phil. • 20-3-2 (11 KOs)
- **8** **GINJIRO SHIGEOKA** — Japan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **9** **PEDRO TADURAN** — Phil. • 14-4-1 (11 KOs)
- **10** **YUDAI SHIGEOKA** — Japan • 5-0-0 (3 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

NAOKI FUKUDA-KAZUTO

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of July 23, 2022

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 21-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 42-2-1 (30 KOs)

4 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (5 KOs)

5 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 12-2-0 (5 KOs)

6 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 47-3-0 (19 KOs)

7 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)

8 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)

9 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)

10 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 8-1-0 (2 KOs)
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS**
Sweden • 8-1-0 (4 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 28-1-0 (13 KOs)
3 **SHADASIA GREEN**
U.S. • 10-0-0 (9 KOs)
4 **JANINA NEUMANN**
Germany • 5-0-0 (5 KOs)
5 **RAQUEL MILLER**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (4 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL** WBO
U.K. • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 28-1-0 (13 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 22-1-1 (12 KOs)
4 **FEMKE HERMANS**
Belgium • 13-4-0 (5 KOs)
5 **RAQUEL MILLER**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (4 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING
U.S. • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE**
Canada • 18-1-0 (1 KO)
2 **PATRICIA BERGHULT** WBC
Sweden • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
3 **HANNAH RANKIN** WBA
U.K. • 12-5-0 (3 KOs)
4 **NATASHA JONAS** WBO
U.K. • 11-2-1 (8 KOs)
5 **MARY SPENCER**
Canada • 6-0-0 (4 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **JESSICA MCCASKILL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 12-2-0 (5 KOs)
1 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)
2 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 45-13-5 (11 KOs)
3 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 23-7-0 (0 KOs)
4 **LOLITA MUZEYA**
Zambia • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
5 **EWA PIATKOWSKA**
Poland • 16-1-0 (4 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **CHANTELLE CAMERON** RING, IBF, WBC
U.K. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)
1 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 27-5-0 (10 KOs)
2 **KALI REIS** WBA, WBO
U.S. • 19-7-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MARY MCGEE**
U.S. • 27-4-0 (15 KOs)
4 **OSHIN DERIEUW**
Belgium • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)
5 **JESSICA CAMARA**
Canada • 8-3-0 (0 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
Ireland • 21-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 42-2-1 (30 KOs)
2 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 47-3-0 (19 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 10-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 14-2-0 (5 KOs)
5 **TERRI HARPER**
U.K. • 12-1-1 (6 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **MIKAELA MAYER** RING, IBF, WBO
U.S. • 17-0-0 (5 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 47-3-0 (19 KOs)
2 **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** WBC
U.S. • 12-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE**
France • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 19-0-1 (5 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN**
U.S. • 18-5-1 (1 KO)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBC, WBO
Puerto Rico • 42-2-1 (30 KOs)
2 **ERIKA CRUZ HERNANDEZ** WBA
Mexico • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
Canada • 41-11-2 (19 KOs)
5 **ELINA TISSEN**
Germany • 25-2-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 39-4-4 (16 KOs)
2 **DINA THORSLUND**
Denmark • 18-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE** WBO
France • 16-0-0 (1 KO)
4 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
Mexico • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
5 **MAUREEN SHEA**
U.S. • 30-2-1 (13 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 18-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 24-3-1 (4 KOs)
3 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-11-4 (19 KOs)
4 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 53-4-2 (30 KOs)
5 **MELISSA ODDESSA PARKER**
U.S. • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 34-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 19-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **YESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 32-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 25-4-1 (4 KOs)
5 **TAMAO OZAWA** WBO
Japan • 17-5-0 (6 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **MARLEN ESPARZA** RING, WBA, WBC
U.S. • 12-1-0 (1 KOs)
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA**
Japan • 19-3-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 31-3-2 (11 KOs)
3 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 24-1-0 (10 KOs)
4 **GABRIELA ALANIZ**
Argentina • 13-0-0 (5 KOs)
5 **IBETH ZAMORA**
Mexico • 32-7-0 (12 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF, WBO
Argentina • 17-0-1 (6 KOs)
3 **KIM CLAVEL**
Canada • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **TSUNAMI TENKAI**
Japan • 28-13-1 (16 KOs)
5 **JESSICA NERY PLATA**
Mexico • 28-2-0 (3 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBA
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 25-2-0 (9 KOs)
3 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 11-0-1 (3 KOs)
4 **ANABEL ORTIZ**
Mexico • 31-5-0 (4 KOs)
5 **SARAH BORMANN**
Germany • 14-0-0 (7 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 17-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 19-0-1 (5 KOs)
3 **AYAKA MIYAO** IBF
Japan • 25-9-2 (6 KOs)
4 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 4-1-1 (1 KO)
5 **NANAE SUZUKI** WBO
Japan • 11-4-1 (1 KO)

The RING STATE OF THE GAME

Compiled by David Greisman, Martin Mulcahey and Anson Wainwright

Text by David Greisman • Note: State of the Game was compiled through fights of July 16, 2022

HANEY: WILLIAM WEST; BIVOL: AL BELLO;

THE RING'S ANNUAL BREAKDOWN OF CURRENT AND FUTURE TRENDS IN BOXING, DIVISION BY DIVISION

SUPERSTARS AND SUPERFIGHTS.

Boxing is at its most enjoyable when top talent shines, and when the matches we want are the matches we actually get.

This, then, is a good time to be a boxing fan.

Right now, there are Ring Magazine champions in 10 of the 17 weight classes in men's boxing. There are undisputed champions in three divisions — and we are one fight away from crowning more in five other weight classes.

None of this can happen unless the best fight the best. That's been happening much more in recent years than in the not-too-distant past. While promotional and network politics remain, right now they serve more as an occasional obstacle than as an immovable force (or rather an immovable farce).

In the wake of the Mayweather and Pacquiao Era, we now have an impressive pool of current and future stars. And below those echelons, there's plenty that will keep us interested and entertained.

So let us take stock of what's going on in boxing's 17 weight classes. We turn to our team of experts — David Greisman, Martin Mulcahey and Anson Wainwright — to examine and explain where we are, where we came from and where we are going.

They've announced that Elvis has left the building, but few believe the King, or in this case the "Gypsy King" Tyson Fury, won't be back.

Fury supposedly retired in April, shortly after depositing Dillian Whyte to the canvas with a beautiful right uppercut in front of a massive crowd at Wembley Stadium in London. That fight served two purposes for Fury. It was a victory lap after a pair of stellar knockout wins to wrap up his trilogy with

FURY: JULIAN FINNEY

Deontay Wilder. It also took care of a long-due mandatory challenger, keeping the WBC title in case Fury does decide to lace his gloves back up.

Fury's reasons for retiring make sense. Boxing is a hard, damaging sport, one he's been in for much of his life. Then again, Fury has retired before and returned. So have so many others.

Fury may be far more interested right now in exhibitions and extracurriculars, be it a return to the WWE or a sideshow bout with a UFC star. Or Fury may be using this absence to build more interest, and more leverage in negotiations, for his comeback.

We can believe what we want. We can speculate all we wish. But we won't know until we know. And whatever choice Fury makes will have a ripple effect on the heavyweight division.

That's because a fight with Fury against the winner of the Oleksandr Usyk-Anthony Joshua rematch in August would be for all the marbles: lineage, undisputed status, the four major title belts and the Ring championship.

Usyk-Joshua 2, scheduled for shortly after this issue went to press, would be intriguing viewing even if not for the Fury factor. The former cruiserweight champ both befuddled and beat Joshua in 2021 and seems primed to defeat him again, and more handily at that, although Usyk will fight amid the war in his home country of Ukraine. Joshua's changed trainers and desperately needs this win to avoid being written off as someone who went from formidable to beatable, who never truly could rebuild from his stunning loss to Andy Ruiz in 2019.

If Fury's vacation leads to him vacating, the Usyk-Joshua victor will reign atop the division with three belts (IBF, WBA, WBO). The most qualified contender to challenge them? Wilder.

Wilder took some deserved time off to recuperate from the punishing third fight with Fury. As hard as that loss may have been on him, both physically and mentally, it also elevated Wilder. Only the best heavyweight has beaten him. Only the best heavyweight could take the best version of Wilder on that night at the T-Mobile Arena. It remains to be seen, however, what version of Wilder is left. What happened in Vegas doesn't necessarily stay there.

Those are your clear top four. The next tier consists of guys who got their shots and came up short, or who are on their way up but haven't yet reached the more elevated echelons.

Fortunately, they're not waiting idly for big fights. Instead, they're picking on each other to see who will belong and who should be gone. Andy Ruiz vs. Luis Ortiz and Joseph Parker vs. Joe Joyce are set for September. Daniel Dubois called out Whyte. Otto Wallin is eyeing Wilder. And we're keeping our eyes on guys like Filip Hrgovic, Frank Sanchez, Arslanbek Makhmudov and Bakhodir Jalolov. ★

BOXING'S BEST

The Ring editors' picks

BEST PUNCHER
NAOYA INOUE
RUNNERS-UP: ARTUR BETERBIEV, DEONTAY WILDER

BEST BOXER
TERENCE CRAWFORD
RUNNERS-UP: SHAKUR STEVENSON, DMITRY BIVOL

MOST PROTECTED
JAIME MUNGUIA
RUNNERS-UP: FRANK SANCHEZ, HYUN MI CHOI

IS HE STILL AROUND?
JEAN PASCAL
RUNNERS-UP: LUIS ORTIZ, ANTHONY DIRRELL

MATCHMAKERS DREAM
TERENCE CRAWFORD VS. ERROL SPENCE JR. (STILL)
RUNNERS-UP: INOUE VS. STEPHEN FULTON, BETERBIEV VS. BIVOL

DESERVES A TITLE SHOT
JOE JOYCE
RUNNERS-UP: VASILIY LOMACHENKO, JOSHUA BUATSI

MOST FUN TO WATCH
JERMELL CHARLO
RUNNERS-UP: ROMAN GONZALEZ, JESSE "BAM" RODRIGUEZ

ON THE WAY UP
JARON "BOOTS" ENNIS
RUNNERS-UP: CONOR BENN, VERGIL ORTIZ

ON THE WAY DOWN
SERGEY DEREVYANCHENKO
RUNNERS-UP: GABRIEL ROSADO, DANIEL JACOBS

Aussie Jai Opetaia is now the man to beat at 200 pounds.

The newest Ring champ in boxing is Jai Opetaia, who got off to a strong start against Mairis Briedis, then had to withstand a second-half rally — and a broken jaw — in order to defeat the king this July.

The cruiserweight division belonged to Briedis after Oleksandr Usyk abdicated his throne. Usyk had won the inaugural World Boxing Super Series tournament, topping Briedis by a narrow margin in the 2018 semifinal. Briedis soon embarked on the next WBSS competition, beating the likes of Noel Gevor, Krzysztof Głowacki and Yuniel Dorticos. After one more victory, Briedis headed Down Under to take on Opetaia in Australia, with his IBF belt also in tow.

Opetaia had never fought on this level as a pro but clearly rose to the occasion. He's now the man at 200, though others will want to dispute that in the ring. They'll need to wait for Opetaia to recover.

Briedis will want a rematch. The other titleholders include Lawrence Okolie, who scored three straight knockouts while winning the WBO title and then defending it, only to have a less sightly outing in his most recent decision victory over Michal Cieslak. Meanwhile, Ilunga Makabu didn't look overly inspiring in January, when he held onto his WBC belt with a rematch win over Thabiso Mchunu. The WBA's guys, Arsen Goulamirian and Ryad Merhy, have been incredibly inactive. Goulamirian was last seen in 2019; Merhy has fought once since then, though not in more than a year. (The unbeaten Goulamirian gave Merhy his sole defeat in 2018.)

There's a pair of British contenders, Richard Riakporhe and Chris Billam-Smith. Riakporhe defeated Billam-Smith a few years ago. Okolie and Billam-Smith are both trained by Shane McGuigan, so don't expect them to clash.

A pair of former light heavyweight titleholders, Badou Jack and Sergey Kovalev, are now cruisers but haven't faced anyone of note. Their name value could help change that, however.

A pair of guys with one loss apiece to recognizable names are on the fringes: Aleksei Papin (a decision loss to Makabu in 2019) and Evgeny Tishchenko (a decision loss to Mchunu in 2021).

Little of this makes the 200-pounders sound compelling, a shame given the occasional history of fun battles here. This is a division with plenty of international representation, and thankfully many of these fighters have been willing to travel in the past. Will the weight class shake out without the structure of another tournament? ★

OPETAIA: PETER WALLIS/GETTY IMAGES; BIVOL: AL BELLO

In a six-week span, Artur Beterbiev and Dmitry Bivol cemented their No. 1 and No. 2 spots. We're one fight away from having an undisputed champion at 175. Unfortunately, that one fight is a little farther away — though hopefully not too far off in the distance.

In early May, Bivol fought confidently and capably while winning a clear decision over Canelo Alvarez. Canelo, No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings going in, was rendered ineffective and looked downright lost at times. By mid-June, Beterbiev stood in with Joe Smith, two power-punchers with three titles (IBF, WBC, WBO) on the line. Three knockdowns later, Beterbiev was the one left standing, the difference in class clear.

The road seemed clear for Beterbiev vs. Bivol, heavy hands vs. sweet science, but two obstacles block the way.

Beterbiev is expected to face twice-beaten Anthony Yarde next and will of course be the heavy favorite, unless he finally begins to look his 37 years of age. Bivol could be in much tougher; the WBA titlist owes a defense against former 168-pound beltholder Gilberto Ramirez. Ramirez has campaigned at light heavyweight since 2019 and has awaited Bivol for some time but hasn't done much of note here. Not yet, at least.

Eddie Hearn, who promotes Bivol, would prefer another 175-pounder from his stable: Joshua Buatsi, the 2016 Olympic bronze medalist who is unbeaten as a pro and recently transitioned from prospect to contender. (Canelo, who works closely with Matchroom, says he wants a Bivol rematch but has a third fight with Gennadiy Golovkin first.) The IBF, meanwhile, has ordered an eliminator between Buatsi and Jean Pascal. Pascal returned in May after nearly two-and-a-half years away; a 2021 rematch with Badou Jack was scuttled when Pascal tested positive for several banned substances.

The good news is we nonetheless remain close to crowning the seventh undisputed champ in men's boxing since 2017.

Nobody else belongs in the picture right now.

Marcus Browne started well against Beterbiev but was broken down, like the rest. Callum Smith came to 175 after taking a drubbing from Canelo at 168. Smith made highlight reels with his KO of Lenin Castillo; his next fight is an elimination bout against once-beaten Mathieu Bauderlique on Aug. 20. ★

Dmitry Bivol outclassed boxing's biggest star, Canelo Alvarez, and sits atop the 175-pound division.

Canelo Alvarez deserved all the praise he received for his run through the super middleweight division, fighting four times in less than 11 months, defeating all three titleholders and emerging as the undisputed champion. If this were such an easy task, then others would've done it.

There's still another top contender — we'll get to him in a bit — and hopefully Canelo will, too. But that match won't happen in 2022. Canelo instead opted for challenging Dmitry Bivol at 175, losing to him in May, and will close out the Gennadiy Golovkin trilogy this fall. Those are both good fights to make, but they have effectively held Canelo's world titles hostage, and the division in limbo, for the year.

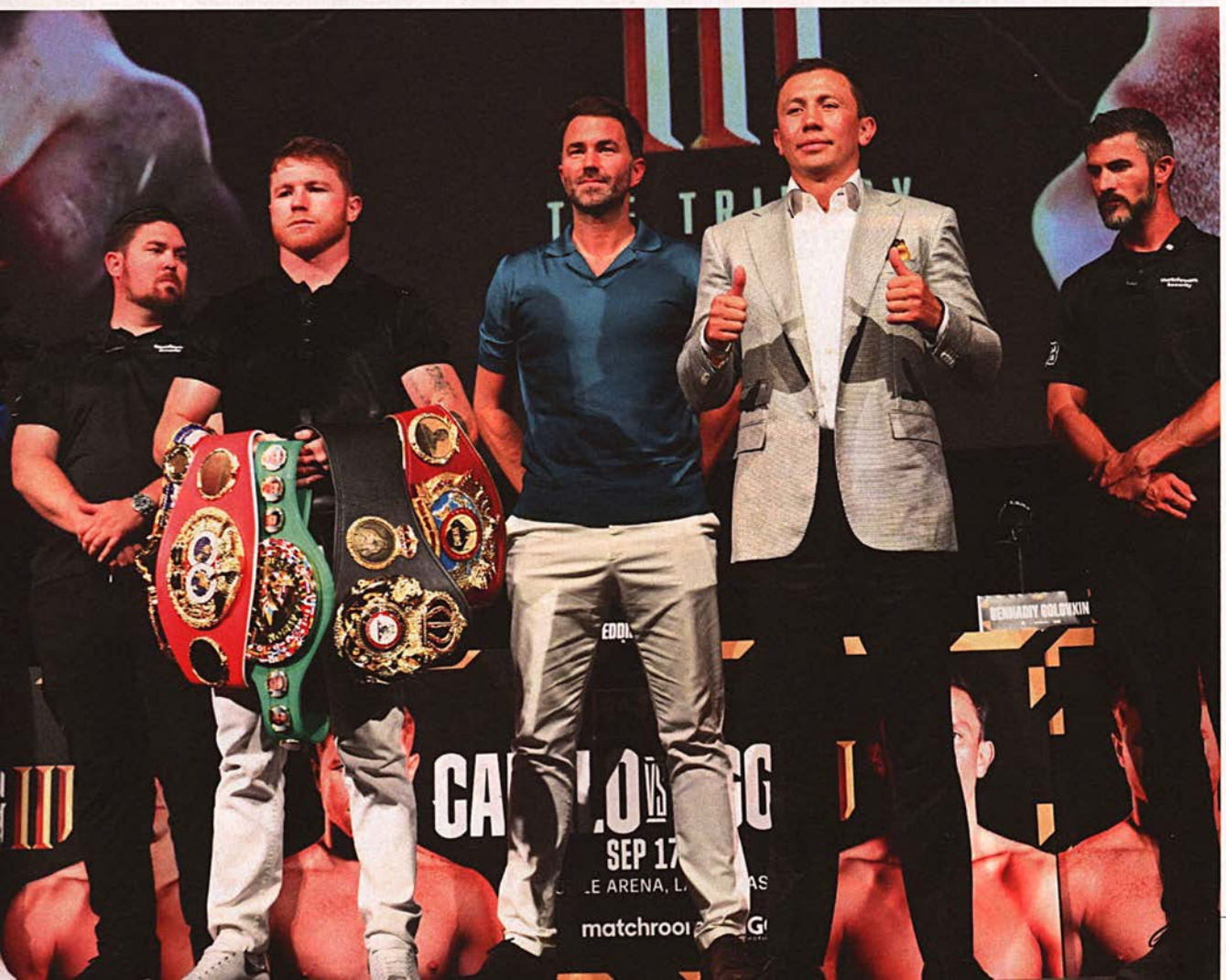
That has kept the aforementioned top contender, David Benavidez, in limbo as well. Benavidez is a formidable challenger, a former titleholder who's never lost but has twice been stripped due to lapses in discipline (cocaine use, coming in overweight). As frustrating as that may be, this is the time for Benavidez to stay busy and to keep making his case for Canelo.

And it provides an opportunity for the other super middleweights — be they former titleholders and title challengers, or the young and less experienced contenders — to try to stand out from the pack.

Those familiar faces include two guys Canelo beat. Billy Joe Saunders suffered a broken orbital bone; his camp has given mixed signals about a return. Caleb Plant has called out Benavidez but could come back against Anthony Dirrell. John Ryder took a controversial decision over Daniel Jacobs; Ryder, somehow, could also get Canelo before Benavidez does.

The newer names include several undefeated contenders and prospects of various viability: David Morrell, Christian Mbilli, Erik Bazinyan, Lerrone Richards, Zach Parker and Vladimir Shishkin. The hype train for Edgar Berlanga, meanwhile, has slowed down considerably. Whereas Benavidez has been chomping at the bit, Berlanga in his last fight was just, well, chomping.

Meanwhile, one middleweight titleholder, Demetrius Andrade, wants to move up while another, Jermall Charlo, could be persuaded to do so. We'll get to them in the next section... ★



Old scores will be settled in the third Canelo-GGG fight.

Jermall Charlo is a decorated world champion who still seeks a career-defining triumph.

This is a division in transition.

The last lineal champ, Canelo Alvarez, departed some time ago. His rival, Gennadiy Golovkin, has two world titles, but there's no guarantee he'll ever compete at 160 again, not with the third Canelo fight coming up this September at super middleweight, and not with Golovkin in his 40s.

Golovkin showed what he had left in April, battling it out in a unification bout (IBF and WBA) with Ryota Murata before breaking him down for a ninth-round stoppage. The two remaining belts belong to Jermall Charlo (WBC) and Demetrius Andrade (WBO).

Charlo has been at middleweight for five years and gone 7-0 here, his most impressive victory coming in a decision over Sergiy Derevyanchenko in 2020. His last appearance was more than a year ago, a wide decision win over Juan Macias Montiel. Charlo was supposed to return in June against Maciej Sulecki but got hurt beforehand. While Charlo says he's open to facing Canelo at super middleweight — who wouldn't be? — Jermall also seems set on middleweight glory. It's quite possible. He's 32, still in his prime and could be the man to lead the division, post-Canelo and post-GGG.

Other candidates are vying for that spot.

Andrade has been at 160 for nearly as long, with just as many fights. There were too many snoozers where he dominated early but took his foot off the gas, but more recently there were entertaining outings: a points win over Liam Williams and a quick drubbing of Jason Quigley.

Alas, Andrade's time with Matchroom Boxing came to an end without him facing any of his more prominent stablemates. Maybe that will bring him closer to a bout with Charlo. Given his history, any skepticism is forgiven.

Andrade was supposed to jump to 168 to face Zach Parker for an interim belt but suffered a training camp injury. He's since been ordered to defend against mandatory challenger Zhanibek Alimkhanuly at 160 once he heals. We'll see which way he goes.

Alimkhanuly is a power-puncher from Kazakhstan. Sound familiar? He's coming off a run of knockouts, dispatching Rob Brant, Hassan N'Dam and Danny Dignum. Alimkhanuly would become the full WBO titlist if Andrade vacates, giving "Qazaq Style" even more momentum. Another unbeaten contender, Jaime Munguia, looks flawed but fun. He battled it out with Gabriel Rosado for 12 rounds, dispatched D'Mitrius Ballard in three and ended a firefight with Jimmy Kelly in five.

Will promotional and network allegiances keep the above names from fighting each other? Will they instead face any of the below? Chris Eubank Jr., who excelled against Williams, may face Conor Benn at a catchweight. Carlos Adames shocked Derevyanchenko, cementing his perpetual bridesmaid status. And Erislandy Lara's scored two straight KOs; the WBA wants Golovkin to face him.

The coming year will see who steps in with whom, and who steps up. ★

ALVAREZ: KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/GETTY IMAGES ; CHARLO: CARMEN MANDATO/GETTY IMAGES

Jermell Charlo is the undisputed boss at 154 after knocking out Brian Castano in their rematch.

Jermell Charlo deservingly sits atop 154 as the last man standing from a de facto round-robin.

These have been a fun few years, with plenty of talent taking each other on and none of the usual promotional obstacles getting in the way. This unofficial tournament also included Brian Castano, Nathaniel Gallimore, Terrell Gausha, Tony Harrison, Jarrett Hurd, Erislandy Lara, Erickson Lubin, Jeison Rosario and Julian Williams.

Charlo won the vacant WBC title in 2016, has gone 7-1-1 since, and added the three other belts along the way. Both of those blemishes were avenged. A loss to Tony Harrison? Charlo knocked him out in the rematch. Then, after putting away Rosario to add the IBF and WBA titles, plus the vacant Ring championship, Charlo faced Castano in 2021 with the WBO prize added to the mix and undisputed status on the line.

Charlo-Castano 1 was a competitive fight that ended in a draw. The sequel ended any debate. Once again, Charlo took his fate into his own hands, dropping Castano twice in the 10th round for the win.

It looks like the fun will continue.

Charlo and Tim Tszyu are expected to meet in early 2023. Tszyu came off the canvas early to beat Gausha by decision this past March. Hopefully the long wait for Charlo-Tszyu — six months after the announcement — won't hold up the rest of the division. The winner will have another mandatory challenger awaiting him: Sebastian Fundora, the impossibly lanky contender who won an enjoyable battle with Lubin in April and may wish to remain busy.

Of course, there's always the potential for Charlo, who's been at junior middleweight for 12 years, to move up to 160. If that happens, the fun of recent years will begin again.

While some have left, gone inactive or are no longer factors, the remaining veterans who've fallen short — Castano, Gausha, Harrison, Lubin, Liam Smith — can still pose a test to those looking to enter the fold. And among those seeking to move up in the ratings are Israil Madrimov, still seeking a decisive ending after two fights with Michel Soro; Magomed Kurbanov; Carlos Ocampo; Jesus Ramos and Bakhram Murtazaliev. ★

PHOTOS BY CHARLO: JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA; SPENCE: COOPER NEILL; CRAWFORD:

The biggest welterweight debate since Mayweather-Pacquiao looks like it will finally be settled. Errol Spence vs. Terence Crawford feels close — we wouldn't be surprised if it's announced after this issue goes to press — with no more promotional politics or network obligations in the way.

Like their predecessors, Spence and Crawford are clearly the two best at welterweight and two of the best, pound-for-pound. The winner would be undisputed at 147, and it'd be hard to debate their standing in the sport.

Spence, nicknamed "The Truth" long ago, has fulfilled that destiny. He earned the IBF title in 2017, unified with the WBC in 2019 against Shawn Porter, then stopped Yordenis Ugas this past April to add the WBA belt as well. He's returned from a terrifying car crash and eye surgery, jumping straight in with tough challenges each time. Of course he's eager to face Crawford.

The feeling is mutual. Crawford had kept himself on the so-called other side of the street by re-signing with Top Rank but has since become a free agent. That will allow Crawford to have a fight that has been frustratingly out of reach for the duration of his reign at 147.

"Bud" arrived here after being Ring champion at 135 and undisputed at 140, stopping Jeff Horn for the WBO 147-pound belt that Horn had seized from Manny Pacquiao. Five defenses have followed, none more impressive than the way he retired Porter last November. Advised he was behind on the cards, Crawford promptly went out and scored two knockdowns and a stoppage.

Spence vs. Crawford is THE fight to make. Plenty more good matches await the eventual winner, thanks to this being one of the best weight classes in boxing.

Jaron "Boots" Ennis is the foremost challenger, making it look almost effortless as he dispatched Sergey Lipinets, Thomas Dulorme and Custio Clayton in a combined nine rounds. Will he get a chance for the throne, or will he instead meet someone else for a newly vacated belt and build more momentum toward challenging the king?

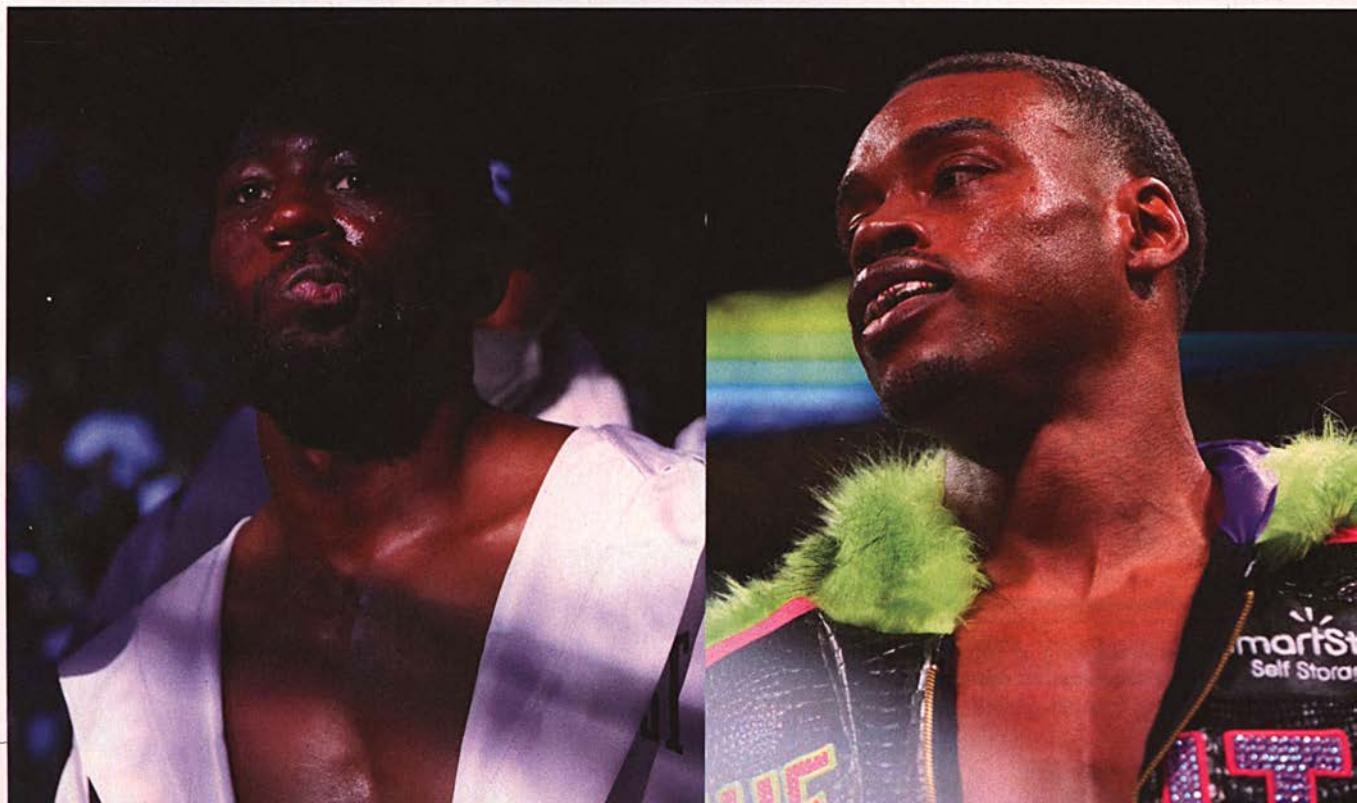
The other vaunted contender is Vergil Ortiz, whose recent run brought early nights against Samuel Vargas, Maurice Hooker and Egidijus Kavaliauskas. Ortiz was due to face Michael McKinson after our deadline.

Ugas, who suffered an orbital bone injury against Spence, will still be held in high regard upon his return. Eimantas Stanionis defeated Radzhab Butaev in April to earn a title shot.

Keith Thurman returned in February after more than two years away, defeating Mario Barrios. He says he'd consider a catchweight fight with middleweight Erislandy Lara. Coincidentally, unbeaten welterweight prospect Conor Benn is likely meeting middleweight Chris Eubank Jr. at a catchweight this fall.

David Avanesyan has won six in a row and had been described as a boogeyman of sorts whom other contenders wouldn't face. But then Ortiz's team says they called Avanesyan's bluff and Avanesyan's team stepped away from the table. Hopefully Avanesyan will be back against another notable name in the near future.

Because this division is constantly restocking itself, we're keeping an eye on the likes of Cody Crowley and Rashidi Ellis. And we'll see which junior welterweights journey up to 147 next. ★



Will Terence Crawford and Errol Spence Jr. finally square off in 2022?

Josh Taylor's reign as undisputed champion, in the eyes of many, should've ended in his first defense, when he took a highly controversial split decision over Jack Catterall. Instead, it ended unceremoniously a few months later, when the WBA stripped Taylor for not facing a mandatory challenger, leaving the Tartan Tornado with three sanctioning body belts. The WBC has since dropped Taylor to two.

Taylor is still the man at 140, given his Ring Magazine title and the lineage created by his impressive 2018-2021 run, when he won the World Boxing Super Series and a pair of titles, then bested Jose Ramirez for the rest of them.

That had Taylor discussing a move many other junior welterweights have made: going up to 147, home to bigger names and paydays. Except Taylor got ahead of himself, his eyes too big for his stomach. He received the split decision nod over Catterall — and plenty of criticism afterward. Taylor says he had an off night. He wants a rematch to prove it. Which is good, because Catterall deserves it.

Those vacant belts will be vied for by Alberto Puello and Batyr Akhmedov (WBA) in August and Regis Prograis and Jose Zepeda (WBC) on a date to be determined.

Puello is unbeaten but unproven. Akhmedov lost to Mario Barrios in 2019 but has won twice since. Prograis, who lost a majority decision to Taylor at the finale of the WBSS in 2019, has won three in a row. Zepeda lost to Ramirez in 2019 but has put together five straight wins since, starting with Jose Pedraza, continuing on with the phenomenal Fight of the Year against Ivan Baranchyk, and most recently dispatching Josue Vargas in 105 seconds.

Ramirez, meanwhile, was initially supposed to be fighting Zepeda for the WBC belt but pulled out because he has an even bigger match with a different kind of ring — his wedding. Ramirez has otherwise bounced back from the Taylor loss, outpointing Pedraza earlier this year.

The division is in flux depending on what happens in Taylor-Catterall 2, and after it. If Taylor wins, will he vacate and migrate? The welterweight picture has changed now that Terence Crawford has left Top Rank, which promotes Taylor, and is now closer to a fight with Errol Spence. Or will Taylor stick around against a new class of challengers? Can he physically do so? If Catterall wins, will the new champ have a target on his back, or will other options be more alluring?

This deep pool of junior welterweights features a mix of veteran talent (Prograis, Ramirez, Zepeda) who still belong in the picture and up-and-coming contenders who want to join them, including Subriel Matias, Arnold Barboza, Shohjahon Ergashev, Gary Antuanne Russell, Brandun Lee and Montana Love.

Oh, and then there's former lightweight champ Teofimo Lopez, who's set to join the 140-pound ranks in August with a fight against Pedro Campa. Another top 135-pounder, Gervonta Davis, has dipped his toes into this division before, stopping Barrios in 2021. So did Ryan Garcia, who beat up Javier Fortuna here in July and then said he's done fighting at lightweight.★

Josh Taylor is still king at 140, but the Scotsman lucked out against Jack Catterall.

Devin Haney left Australia with a complete collection of belts.

The one of the "Four Princes" who got the least buzz is now the one prince who can consider himself king. Devin Haney showed that success in the ring isn't about the size of your social media following, but rather about the skills you have and your willingness to step up.

It's otherwise been a chaotic couple of years. Vasiliy Lomachenko gave up too many early rounds, and the championship, to Teofimo Lopez. Then Lopez had a year of drama and lost in his first defense to George Kambosos, who didn't hold on for long either. Six months after Kambosos seized the day, Haney went Down Under and brought home every single souvenir possible.

So it's Haney who has both the lineage and undisputed status. One of the princes, Lopez, left for 140. The other two, Gervonta Davis and Ryan Garcia, remain intriguing potential opponents — for Haney or for each other — so long as the obstacles that kept those fights from being made before can now be overcome.

Haney's first obligation will be a contractually mandated rematch with Kambosos, though it's hard to see the Australian besting the American. Davis has built up big fan bases in several cities and is cultivating a pay-per-view following as well, outpointing Isaac Cruz and stopping Rolly Romero in a pair of lightweight outings. He could also jump back up to 140.

Garcia has done more talking than fighting, sidelined by mental health struggles and a hand injury for 15 months after his early 2021 win over Luke Campbell. He returned with a wide decision over Emmanuel Tagoe and a six-round stoppage of Javier Fortuna, opponents who, again, aren't the fighters he says so much about facing (but never does). Garcia-Fortuna was at 140 for Fortuna's sake. Garcia insists that he'll stay there; we'll see what happens next.

Lomachenko rebounded with a pair of wins last year but has been off in 2022 due to the war in Ukraine, which forced him to withdraw from facing Kambosos in June (Haney substituted in). Lomachenko could be back soon, though, October the target month, according to his promoter.

Those are the so-called royalty, but they aren't the only ones aspiring for power. Undefeated up-and-comers Denys Berinchyk, Gustavo Lemos, Frank Martin, Jamaine Ortiz, Michel Rivera and William Zepeda each garnered attention for recent victories. They should aim for those solid second and third tiers, including Cruz (who will face Eduardo Ramirez in an elimination bout), Joseph Diaz Jr. and Jeremia Nakathila.

Of course, there's a huge threat to the throne who could invade soon: Shakur Stevenson. Speaking of... ★

HANEY: WILLIAM WEST/AFP; TAYLOR: STEVE WELSH/PA IMAGES

Shakur Stevenson dominated Oscar Valdez to emerge as Ring, WBC and WBO champ at 130.

The future isn't always easy to predict, but when it comes to Shakur Stevenson, it was obvious from early on that he was a future star. And it's clear as day now that he's too good for the 130-pound division. Beyond that, there really aren't enough foes who are good enough to keep Stevenson here much longer once bigger opportunities open up at 135.

In the meantime, Stevenson has a September fight against Robson Conceicao, who lost a decision in 2021 to Oscar Valdez but bounced back by beating Xavier Martinez in January.

Speaking of Valdez, he's ranked right after Stevenson, but the huge gap between them was apparent in April, when Stevenson dominated to unify the WBC and WBO titles and win the vacant Ring championship.

The real drama would come from fights among any combination of the rest, including Valdez. These guys would most likely be overwhelmed against Stevenson, and are currently otherwise overshadowed by him. Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov was held to a draw by an overweight Joseph Diaz Jr. last year. Roger Gutierrez owns the WBA belt after a pair of decisions over Rene Alvarado. Gutierrez was due to defend after our deadline against Hector Garcia, who upset Chris Colbert earlier this year.

Speaking of shocks, that's what Joe Cordina did to Kenichi Ogawa in June, knocking him out with a right hand four minutes in for the IBF title. That grabbed Stevenson's attention, but first Cordina has been ordered to face Rakhimov.

Ogawa will have to bounce back, which is what other notable junior lightweights are attempting: Lamont Roach (who is in line for a WBA title shot after making it four in a row with a unanimous decision over Angel Rodriguez in a July elimination bout), O'Shaquie Foster (nine straight) and Samir Ziani (11). ★

STEVENSON: STEVE MARCUS; WOOD: NIGEL RODDIS/GETTY IMAGES

Mix and match almost any of the top 10 fighters here — maybe even the top 15 — and you're bound to get a fun fight, or at least an interesting one.

That's not to say there's parity from 1-15, but there are plenty of featherweights whose skill and accomplishments are comparable, meaning there aren't one or two leaders of the pack. Not yet, at least.

Everything written here so far is exactly why we need more bouts between them. Any of them. All of them.

Let's start with the titleholders. Leo Santa Cruz (WBA) is the longest-reigning, dating back to his 2017 rematch win over Carl Frampton. Santa Cruz also hasn't fought in the division in three-and-a-half years. Santa Cruz could potentially face Leigh Wood, who holds the secondary WBA belt, but Wood might go elsewhere. Wood stopped Can Xu and Michael Conlan in back-to-back fights, the latter a Fight of the Year candidate for 2022.

Emanuel Navarrete battled it out with Joet Gonzalez in 2021 for his second WBO title defense and is due to make the third, against Eduardo Baez, in August. After that could come an eventual clash with Robeisy Ramirez, the two-time Olympic gold medalist who has steadied himself, and developed decently, after a surprising loss in his pro debut. Navarrete vs. Ramirez would make sense. Both are promoted by Top Rank, whose various featherweights have held this belt for years.

Josh Warrington vacated the IBF title in early 2021 and then suffered a shocking stoppage loss to Mauricio Lara, but he regained the belt with a dominant TKO win in a rematch with Kiko Martinez earlier this year. Warrington suffered a broken jaw against Martinez and will owe a mandatory to Luis Alberto Lopez when he returns. If Warrington wins, a third fight with Lara — their rematch ended with a clash of heads — would close the books on their rivalry.

Rey Vargas, who came to 126 late last year, picked up the WBC belt in July with a split decision over Mark Magsayo. He called for Santa Cruz afterward.

Magsayo had won the title from Gary Russell Jr., ending a reign that dated back to 2015 with eye-opening talent and jaw-clenching periods of inactivity. With that perhaps in mind, Russell came in with an injury against Magsayo. If Russell chooses to remain at 126 once he's healthy, he'd match up well with plenty of potential foes. The Russell family has unfortunately suffered multiple tragedies in recent years, so it's also understandable if he remains out of the ring for a spell.

If the division wasn't stacked enough, it just welcomed former 122-pound titleholder Brandon Figueroa, who arrived this July with a TKO of Carlos Castro.

Step 1: Mix and match. Step 2: Sit back and enjoy. ★

Leigh Wood has gone from strength to strength at 126 pounds.

By next year, there should be a new undisputed champion at 122.

Stephen Fulton and Murodjon Akhmadaliev hold all four of the world titles. Fulton's ascent has been rapid, impressive and enjoyable. He won the WBO belt in 2021 with a wide decision over unbeaten Angelo Leo, added the WBC before the end of the year in a very competitive battle with unbeaten Brandon Figueroa, then nearly shut out former unified titleholder Daniel Roman earlier this year.

Akhmadaliev is the man who beat Roman for the IBF and WBA titles back in 2020, back when the Olympic bronze medalist from Uzbekistan was just 7-0 as a pro. He made his third defense this June, stopping Ronny Rios but injuring his left hand in the process.

If that winds up delaying Fulton vs. Akhmadaliev, then at least the Philadelphian has good options. The opponent most fantasized about doesn't come from these ranks, but rather from 118: a tantalizing clash with pound-for-pound king Naoya Inoue (more on him in the next section).

Fulton could also opt to defend against another undefeated contender, Ra'eese Aleem, or once-beaten Luis Nery, whose sole defeat came against Figueroa last year. Nery returned in February and edged Carlos Castro.

Marlon Tapales, stopped by Ryosuke Iwasa in 2019, has won three straight and is due a shot at Akhmadaliev. He's part of a group of contenders waiting for a frontrunner to emerge. Leo has been away for more than a year. Azat Hovhannisyan has won seven straight since losing to then-titleholder Rey Vargas but may have to keep waiting for another shot. Former 118-pound titleholder Zolani Tete recently arrived in the division. Takuma Inoue, Naoya's younger brother, came here last year. Roman, meanwhile, needs a win against any of these names if he's going to stay relevant.★

Unified titleholder Stephen Fulton made easy work of Daniel Roman.

Japanese star Naoya Inoue is just one belt away from undisputed honors at 118 pounds.

One fight separates Naoya Inoue from being the undisputed champion. Given the way Inoue separates his opponents from their senses, that one fight seems almost guaranteed to end, once again, with Inoue triumphant.

Although Paul Butler and his WBO belt aren't exactly the real-life version of a video game's "final boss," the fight itself isn't necessarily anticlimactic. Instead, it's more like the cherry on top of a run through the ranks that, on its own, is quite a delicious bowl of ice cream.

Inoue's eight fights at 118 have lasted a total of 101 minutes. His first match with Nonito Donaire, the 2019 Fight of the Year and the only bout that went the distance, makes up for more than one-third of that total. Inoue picked up the Ring, IBF, WBA and WBC titles along the way — the last coming by blitzing Donaire in less than two rounds in their rematch — and cemented why he's one of the best, if not the best, fighter in the world.

Butler isn't the only one left for Inoue. He's just the only one left with a belt. And part of being so high on pound-for-pound lists is the expectation of moving from division to division. As we mentioned in the previous section, people are clamoring for Inoue to jump to a fourth weight class.

But otherwise, there's John Riel Casimero, whose troubles making weight led to him being stripped of the WBO belt.

The rest of the division pales even further in comparison, though it's an unfair comparison, to Inoue. Some are still on their way up, like Gary Antonio Russell, who beat Juan Carlos Payano by technical decision. Lee McGregor is also early in his career but may be growing out of 118. Vincent Astrolabio edged Guillermo Rigondeaux in February.

Others have fallen short but would still be viable in a post-Inoue landscape: Emmanuel Rodriguez and Jason Moloney (both victims of Inoue), Rau'shee Warren and Alejandro Santiago (if he returns to bantamweight). Donaire, meanwhile, hasn't announced his retirement.

There's one other way the power vacuum could be filled: If any of the many good names at 115 move up, be it to face Inoue or to replace him. So let's get to that division now...★

PHOTOS BY INOUE: THE ASAHI SHIMBUN; FULTON: RYAN HAFEY / PREMIER BOXING

Jesse Rodriguez battered Srisaket Sor Rungvisai and proved his class at 115.

The rightful story of 2021 involved Juan Francisco Estrada and Roman "Chocolatito" Gonzalez. The rightful story so far in 2022 has to be Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez, who has quickly seized the spotlight.

Those are the big stories. They're not the only ones.

We should nevertheless start with Estrada and Gonzalez, whose highly anticipated rematch last year somehow exceeded its lofty expectations. The ending wasn't popular. Gonzalez, the sentimental favorite, proved he still brings pound-for-pound talent into the ring even if his best days are behind him. Many wanted him to win. Many thought he did. Two judges disagreed.

That left Estrada with the Ring title and the unified WBA and WBC belts, as well as the lineage at 115, a throne he took in 2019 from Srisaket Sor Rungvisai — the man we thought had sent Gonzalez into the sunset. Estrada, a top talent himself, has also picked up a pair of victories over Carlos Cuadras during his time in the division. There was talk of Estrada and Gonzalez heading into an immediate rubber match, welcome news given the 100 months between their first and second battles. Alas, Gonzalez tested positive for COVID, scuttling their plans.

Estrada didn't fight again in 2021. Then Estrada tested positive ahead of the rescheduled March 2022 date. Gonzalez instead battered Julio Cesar Martinez. Estrada has since vacated the WBA belt, opting for another fight instead of a very good mandatory, Joshua Franco, who wrapped up his trilogy with Andrew Moloney last year at 2-0 with one "no decision." Franco is Bam Rodriguez's older brother. And this isn't even Rodriguez's usual weight class. But he gained fans by stepping in on very late notice — and stepping all the way up from 108 — to beat Cuadras for the vacant WBC title in February with an eye-catching mix of speed and skill. Then Rodriguez defeated the guy Cuadras was originally supposed to face, Sor Rungvisai, dominating, dropping and stopping the tough former champ in June.

And while Rodriguez said he would go down to flyweight and leave 115 to his brother, Bam is set to remain for at least one more match, in September against Israel Gonzalez (who has thrice come up short in title fights).

There'll be plenty of demand for him to stay and challenge more top names here. Just as there continues to be demand for those names — in one of boxing's most competitive and compelling divisions — to travel from their many different corners of the globe in order to collide.

Kazuto Ioka won handily over Donnie Nietes in July, avenging a split decision from 2018 and defending his WBO belt. Ioka remains the third hydra head, despite Bam being in the picture. Nietes, 40, says he still wants to fight on for a little longer.

Fernando Martinez came seemingly out of nowhere to seize the IBF title from Jerwin Ancajas in February. The rematch takes place on Oct. 8 in L.A. Other good fighters are working their way back up after defeats in the past year or two: Francisco Rodriguez Jr., Kosei Tanaka (both to Ioka) and Moloney (to Franco).

And others may someday join the party at junior bantamweight: Sunny Edwards and Junto Nakatani, a pair of flyweight titleholders, would make particularly intriguing additions.★

RODRIGUEZ: ED MULHOLLAND/MATCHROOM; EDWARDS: FRANCOIS NEL

It's been some time since the titles here were last unified — not since Juan Francisco Estrada vacated his belts in 2016. The last time two flyweight titleholders faced each other was almost a decade ago, when Brian Viloria stopped Hernan Marquez.

That might soon change.

The first to separate from the peloton at 112 could be the winner of an expected fall 2022 clash between Sunny Edwards (IBF) and Julio Cesar Martinez (WBC).

Edwards has certainly done his part to try to stand out from the pack. He's undefeated, brash, a consistent presence on social media and eager to be in the ring, making two defenses in the span of three months. Of course, it's easier to do that when you're as able as Edwards is at boxing and leaving the ring relatively unscathed after 12 rounds. Martinez has a completely different style and absorbed plenty of punishment in March, when he stepped in on late notice against Roman Gonzalez up at 115.

The other belts belong to Junto Nakatani and Artem Dalakian. Nakatani opened eyes with his recent run of knockouts, picking up the vacant WBO in 2020 with a KO of Giemel Magramo, traveling from Japan to America in 2021 to take out Angel Acosta, then returning home to stop Ryota Yamauchi. Nakatani may be the next star out of Japan. It's just a question of where he'll be: He sought to unify but may prefer to move to the star-studded 115-pound division soon.

Dalakian, meanwhile, has only defended his WBA title five times since winning it in early 2018. That inactivity isn't his choice. He fought just before the pandemic shut things down in 2020, returned in late 2021 with a TKO of Luis Concepcion, and now there is war in his country of Ukraine.

The unification bout also means McWilliams Arroyo will again have to wait for Martinez, who has pulled out of fights with Arroyo multiple times. Their lone clash in late 2021 started fun but ended in a no contest due to an early clash of heads.

The other contenders here include Felix Alvarado, Jackson Chauke and Angel Ayala Lardizabal. The other potential star hasn't yet made 112 his home: Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez, who jumped from 108 to make a splash at 115, has said he wants to go back down but keeps making good fights one division above here. ★

The ambitious Sunny Edwards wants more belts and more glory at 112.

The longest reigning of Ring Magazine's 10 champions in men's boxing is Hiroto Kyoguchi, who rose to the top on the final day of 2018 with a TKO of Hekkie Budler.

Kyoguchi has only defended the WBA title four times since, with two periods of inactivity due to the pandemic and then injury. And they haven't all been easy, even in his two recent stoppage wins. Axel Aragon Vega gave Kyoguchi some trouble before hurting his hand and calling it a night. And the judges had Kyoguchi's fight with Esteban Bermudez very close before Kyoguchi ended the bloody battle in the eighth.

Still, that latter win is a good one, and not just because Kyoguchi was coming off a 15-month layoff. Bermudez had been away for a year himself after an upset victory over the previously unbeaten Carlos Canizales.

He's joined in this division by several familiar faces. Kenshiro Teraji came back from his own shocking loss, to Masamichi Yabuki, decisively finishing Yabuki in three in their rematch to regain the WBC belt.

Budler, who was gone for nearly 29 months after the Kyoguchi defeat, shook off rust in 2021 and then edged former titleholder Elwin Soto this past June. Like a horror movie villain, Budler keeps popping back up every time you think he's done.

The man who dethroned Soto for the WBO prize, Jonathan Gonzalez, fended off Mark Anthony Barriga in June for his first defense. That was Gonzalez's fourth straight win since suffering a TKO loss to Kosei Tanaka and subsequently migrating here from flyweight.

Kyoguchi, Teraji and Gonzalez are the three titleholders; the IBF is vacant. We don't know yet if they will face each other or choose from competent contenders like Bermudez, Canizales and Soto, who also could bounce back from their losses. (Yabuki's next outing will be at flyweight.)

There also are undefeated up-and-comers: Shokichi Iwata (yet another potential Japanese star, like several of the names above), Daniel Matellon, Sivenathi Nontshinga and Mark Vicelles could easily be next in line. ★

Hiroto Kyoguchi, pictured in action against Esteban Bermudez, is Ring champ at 108.

Petchmanee CP Freshmart is the WBC titleholder at 105.

For years, this division belonged to Knockout CP Freshmart and Wanheng Menayothin. Not anymore. Now this is a tale of two Freshmarts.

Knockout is the strawweight stalwart whose WBA reign dates back six years. We'll return to him in a moment. First, we need to talk about Petchmanee CP Freshmart — no relation, as many Thai fighters take on a nom de guerre — who picked up the WBC belt in late 2020.

Petchmanee accomplished this by dethroning Menayothin, who was 54-0 at the time. Their rematch in early 2022 ended the same way, this time with Petchmanee winning wider than before. Petchmanee was scheduled to make his third defense, against Tsubasa Koura, in August.

That brings us back to Knockout. He and Menayothin finally shared the ring this July, ending a wait longer than the one for Mayweather-Pacquiao. Knockout won a wide unanimous decision, his 11th successful defense, closing the book on the Menayothin Era in the process.

Will the Freshmarts face each other? Or will there be another too-long wait for supremacy?

In the meantime, there's a new IBF titleholder: Daniel Valladares, who took a split decision over Rene Mark Cuarto in July. A rematch may be necessary. Masataka Taniguchi hasn't had his WBO belt very long either; he earned it by stopping Wilfredo Mendez in the 11th round last December and got the same result in April against Kai Ishizawa.

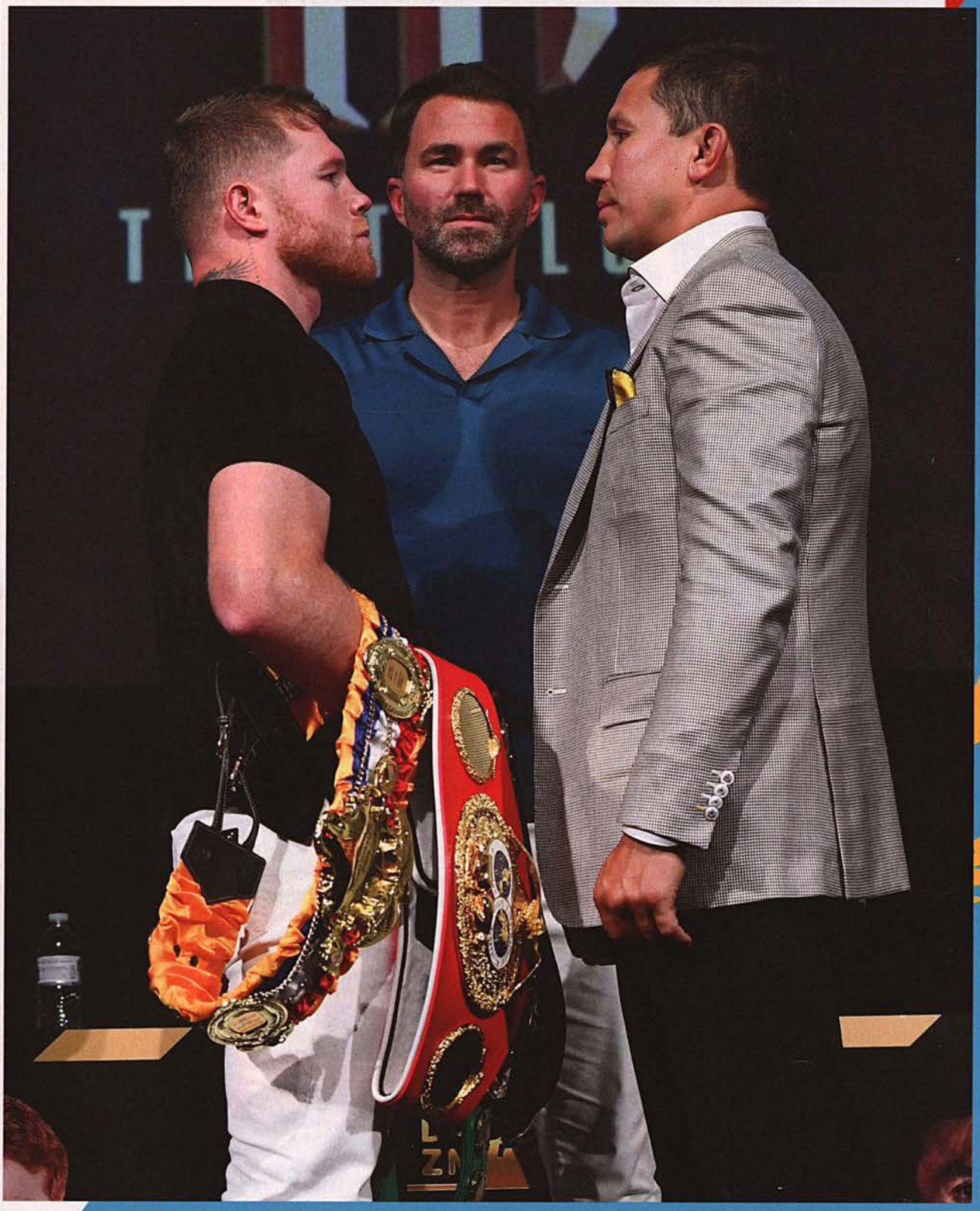
There are others in Japan besides Taniguchi who are on their way up: Ginjiro and Yudai Shigeoka. We're particularly high on Ginjiro. Both are early in their careers but perhaps are close to a title shot, given their talent and the way these lighter weight classes tend to operate.

Also moving fast are Erick Rosa and Oscar Collazo, both of whom beat former titleholder Vic Saludar. Rosa is owed a fight with Knockout CP Freshmart. Where will the Dominican and Thai fighters end up meeting?

We often also see former titleholders return to past glory. That's what Mendez, Saludar and Pedro Taduran (who lost a pair of close ones to Cuarto) will try to do.

KYOGUCHI: REFUGIO RUIZ/GETTY IMAGES

BATTLE PLAN:



CANELO ALVAREZ vs. GENNADIY GOLOVKIN III

TWO RESPECTED TRAINERS TELL THE RING HOW THEY WOULD PREPARE THE ARCH RIVALS FOR THEIR THIRD CLASH

By **Abraham Gonzalez**

The trilogy fight that everyone said they didn't want but deep down inside have been craving to watch – Saul "Canelo" Alvarez and Gennadiy "GGG" Golovkin – is upon us. Alvarez will defend his undisputed super middleweight championship against Golovkin on September 17 at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

There won't be another fight this year with as much clear and present tension at the surface. Alvarez-Golovkin is a bona fide grudge match.

Their rivalry began in September 2017 when the future hall of famers first met with the lineal middleweight championship at stake. Their hotly contested 12-rounder was one of those rare instances when a heavily anticipated event surpassed the pre-fight hype. However, leave it to boxing – specifically the official judges – to ruin what many otherwise would have considered a masterpiece of a fight. Don Trella scored the bout even (114-114). Dave Moretti scored the fight for Golovkin by a 115-113 tally. The third card – Adalaide Byrd's 118-110 score for Alvarez – rendered the fight a split draw and elicited massive controversy. Golovkin fans were outraged, as they (along with the vast majority of the media) thought he pulled out a clear victory. The heated chatter all but sealed the deal for an immediate rematch.

The compelling buildup to the return bout, slated for May 2018, turned contentious when Alvarez tested positive for the banned substance clenbuterol at the start of the year. A six-month suspension pushed the rematch to September, creating more time and debate material to fuel the fight fans' craving for a decisive finish to a sequel.

One year after bout No. 1, Alvarez and Golovkin once again over-delivered, producing a 12-round battle that surpassed their first fight and earned The Ring's 2018 Fight of the Year honor.

This time, Alvarez stood his ground and exchanged with the veteran regarded as a superior puncher, and the close scorecards reflected the hard-fought nature of the rematch. Glenn Feldman saw it even (114-114), while Dave Moretti and Steve Weisfeld scored it 115-113 for Canelo. There wasn't an outcry from the fans on the decision, as it seemed like Alvarez did just enough to win, but some still felt Golovkin should have received the nod from the judges.

Both fighters went their separate ways after the rematch, and from that point, Golovkin spoke of a third fight more than Alvarez, who seemed content with the two-fer. Months after Alvarez inked a record-breaking contract with DAZN, Golovkin signed a deal with the streaming sports platform with the promise of bout No. 3. Instead, Alvarez cut ties with DAZN and went on to become the champ at 168. Then he returned to the platform on a limited basis, with control over who he fought.The suits at DAZN still hoped they could land the trilogy, but it wasn't happening until Canelo dared to be great and lost a light heavyweight title challenge against Dmitry Bivol in May. Despite the upset loss, Canelo continued with his plans to fight Golovkin for the third time.

So here we are. No hype train is needed for this one thanks to the first two bouts. Although Golovkin is now 40 and Alvarez is 32, the thought is that they can still deliver a competitive, elite-level fight. Golovkin, the holder of two major world 160-pound titles, is still The Ring's No. 1-rated middleweight. Alvarez is the Ring champion of the 168-pound division.

With such a significant matchup, The Ring sought the opinions of two veteran trainers to help sort out what could occur on September 17.

Calvin Ford trains undefeated lightweight star Gervonta "Tank" Davis. He also works with pro prospects, amateurs and off-the-street youth at the Upton Gym in Baltimore, Maryland, where he is respected for his character as well as his training acumen.

Ismael Salas, who works out of the Salas Boxing Academy in Las Vegas, trains former WBA welterweight titleholder Yordenis Ugas. The underrated but brilliantly accomplished Cuban coach has also worked with Kazuto Ioka, Erislandy Lara, Yuriorkis Gamboa and Carlos Adames.

Ford tells us how he would train Alvarez to turn back what will no doubt be a spirited challenge from Golovkin.

Salas explains how he would get Golovkin ready for the super middleweight championship, with some tweaks employed due to GGG's age.

CALVIN FORD ON HOW HE WOULD TRAIN CANELO:

"GGG has already been in the ring with Canelo, so he has something to prove. I don't know if this is going to be GGG's last fight or not.

"Canelo is already good at everything he is doing, so I wouldn't change a thing [technically speaking], but I would put in his head that he cannot afford another loss. The whole camp would be focused on Canelo looking impressive in that fight. GGG has been off a little longer, so Canelo has to show him that he doesn't belong in the same ring as him.

"I would sit down with him and show him the first two fights, where he allowed GGG to build momentum.

"When it comes to sparring, I would bring in guys that are bigger than Canelo so he could walk through them at the beginning of the camp. Then I would bring in smaller guys so that they could touch him up. The thought behind that is that I would want Canelo to be nonstop and show the world that GGG just doesn't belong in there with him at his age and level.

"Canelo would have to make a statement to the world, because after that loss [against Bivol], it messed with his legacy while he was chasing

it. Canelo went to another weight class and fought someone bigger than him to chase another belt. When he gets in there with GGG, he is going to make people talk again. He has to send a message like 'I'm still the dude' to those young bucks.

"We wouldn't have this third fight with GGG if Canelo would have dominated him, so this time he can't let GGG box better than him. Canelo is a better boxer now than he was before.

"I wouldn't train Canelo to get the stoppage, as I don't train any of my fighters to do that. It's a 12-round fight, and you never know how the fight is going to go. Canelo has to be impressive enough so that people won't talk about his last loss.

"They say Canelo isn't fighting any of the good fighters from this era, so with this fight, he has to send that message to everyone so that he can show that he took all of the big fights before going out. Canelo is already at that level and is taking all the fights the people want to see."

ISMAEL SALAS ON HOW HE WOULD TRAIN GGG:

"Seeing Canelo's last fight, one thing is clear: As long as GGG is using his left jab and switching it from top to bottom and bottom to top and controlling the distance, Canelo will be easy to hit. Canelo is very dangerous if you are standing in front of him. Canelo has problems with guys that go in and out, which is why he lost the last fight against Bivol. Erislandy Lara showed how to beat Canelo, but he didn't get the decision that night. Bivol did the same, but he punched and moved more and was able to get the victory.

"When talking about GGG, his training program cannot be the

Calvin Ford trains elite-level boxer-puncher Gervonta Davis.

ETHAN MILLER

Ismael Salas works with former 147-pound champ Yordenis Ugas.

same as it was for the past four to five years. What I mean by that is I would have to control his daily heart rate, workout, and the amount of rest he takes. All of that will tell me how his body is responding every day. It is important that I keep GGG fresh at all times.

"He has a lot of different experiences as an amateur and as a pro. I remember I saw him at the 2003 World Championships in Bangkok, where he won the gold medal. I remember GGG had a beautiful side-to-side movement that resembled everything Bivol did in his last fight. Since GGG has been working so long, he burned up many things, which is why he got old very fast. I thought GGG won the first fight, but in the second one he got tired towards the end.

"GGG at this age is a different fighter, but he can still do many things really well. For this fight, GGG has to go back to his amateur days and punch/move, move/punch against Canelo.

"I would bring in smaller, faster guys to spar GGG so that I could keep him fresh. There is no reason to bring in hard sparring, as that can be worse than a real fight. I use three numbers when it comes to sparring:

1. It's a four-round sparring session with a big guy.

2. Then I go to a six-round session with a bigger guy.

3. Finally, I would go to nine or 10 rounds, the maximum number of rounds I would do that day. When I start to do this, it will only be once or twice a week.

"Ten days before the fight would be the last time he would spar. This is very important because it will show how quickly he can recover from daily training and not burn out. A fighter like him, with so much experience as an amateur and pro, can easily peak. You have to always monitor his peak, which means high-intensity training and slowing down towards the end so that he can then peak." RING

GERVONTA DAVIS VS. **RYAN GARCIA** HAS ALL THE INGREDIENTS TO BE A COMPELLING FIGHT AND A SUCCESSFUL PPV EVENT, BUT WILL THE BOXING BUSINESS ALLOW IT TO HAPPEN?

By **Doug Fischer**

THE GEN-Z

AL BELLO

SYE WILLIAMS

THE GEN-Z SUPERFIGHT

Devin Haney unified all four major lightweight titles and won the coveted Ring Magazine belt with a unanimous decision over George Kambosos Jr. in June, but the most talked-about potential matchup in the 135-pound division does not include the newly crowned undisputed champ.

The lightweight fight that everyone is buzzing about involves the highest-rated undefeated contenders – Ring Magazine's No. 4-ranked Gervonta "Tank" Davis and No. 5-ranked Ryan Garcia – who also happen to be the most popular young Americans in boxing.

Much of the chatter has been led by Garcia, who isn't even sure he can still make lightweight but is dead set on fighting Davis. And despite all the usual political and industry roadblocks that often delay or prevent high-profile copromotions, Garcia is doing a great job fanning the flames of demand among both hardcore fans and his 10 million-plus social media followers.

He was ringside at Davis' sixth-round knockout of Rolando Romero in May, where he commanded almost as much attention as Tank's sensational one-hitter-quitter. Garcia continued to talk up the Davis fight going into his July 16 junior welterweight bout with Javier Fortuna, whom he dominated to a sixth-round stoppage at Crypto.com Arena (formerly Staples Center) in Los Angeles.

Haney was among the 11,000-plus inside the arena, but Garcia's focus and the media's questions remained on Davis during the post-fight press conference, in part because Haney has a contractually obligated rematch with Kambosos in October but mainly because Tank moves the needle.

Almost 19,000 packed Barclays Center in Brooklyn to witness Davis humble Romero. More than 15,000 watched him outpoint Isaac Cruz at Crypto.com Arena in December.

Garcia also puts butts in the seats. More than 10,000 gathered at the Honda Center in Anaheim, California, on Valentine's Day in 2020 to watch a 21-year-old Garcia blitz Francisco Fonseca in one round. A little over 12,000 assembled at the Alamodome in San Antonio to watch him hunt Emmanuel Tagoe for 12 rounds in April.

"Tank and I have captivated the culture," Garcia told The Ring prior to facing Fortuna. "Our fight means a lot to the sport when it happens. I am determined to make it [my] next fight.

"[We] hit different demographics, but combining our two demographics, you've got pretty much the world. Honestly, I think we'd do 500,000 pay-per-view buys. I wouldn't expect anything less than that.

Davis finished off Rolando Romero with a stunning left hook in the sixth round of their May encounter.

SYE WILLIAMS

Garcia notched his 23rd victory with a sixth-round knockout of Javier Fortuna.

"You got celebrities who are going to go crazy for it. You got star athletes who are going to go crazy for it. You got everybody. [When we fight,] the whole culture is going to be watching at the end of the day. Everybody that's in with what's 'in' is going to be talking about that fight. You'll have celebrities like LeBron [James] who will be there."

It sounds like Garcia is overstating both his and Davis' popularity, but Mark Taffet, the former senior vice president of HBO PPV and a bona fide expert in the pay-per-view business, agrees with the social media influencer's prediction.

"As a boxing fan, I love the Davis-Garcia fight," Taffet told The Ring. "If it does happen, I would expect around 500,000 pay-per-view buys with some potential upside given the combustible personalities of the fighters and promoters. It features two of boxing's young studs, the franchise players from two promotional powers, and a lot of attitude and bravado.

"Each fighter has a passionate fan base from two of boxing's most important and vibrant market segments – African Americans and Latinos. And, of course, the competitiveness of this fight starts with the two promoters – Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Oscar De La Hoya – and the energy spews forth from there. It would be a great promotion with lots of spice and a lot of bragging rights on the line. That's exactly what fans look for in pay-per-view fights."

The matchup makes sense from a business standpoint, but that's where longtime observers like Steve Kim get cynical. How often in recent years has the boxing industry delivered the really big matchups that fans demanded? How long have we been waiting for Errol Spence-Terence Crawford?

"Once again, the business of boxing will usurp common sense," the veteran columnist predicts. "This is a matchup that has some real buzz to it, but unfortunately the two sides, Golden Boy Promotions and Mayweather Promotions, get along as well as the Hatfields and McCoys. And like many other would-be fights, it's bogged down in promotional alliances and network loyalties. Many times it's not about the boxers but rather who handles them."

Kim is not wrong about the fighters' handlers or their broadcast allegiances. De La Hoya, who promotes Garcia, and Mayweather, who continues to represent Davis despite speculation that their promotional contract ended after the Romero fight, have never been pals.

Davis has been exclusive to Showtime and Showtime PPV (in the U.S.) since his first world title victory against Jose Pedraza in January 2017. Garcia has fought exclusively on DAZN since he dispatched Braulio Rodriguez on the Canelo Alvarez-Rocky Fielding undercard in

December 2018.

The Garcia-Fortuna post-fight press conference began with Golden Boy representative Robert Gasparri telling the media that DAZN must be involved for the Davis-Garcia showdown to happen.

There are other hurdles in the way of the matchup – such as Garcia's declaration that he'll never fight at lightweight again (after weighing in near the junior welterweight limit for his last two bouts) and Mayweather's demand for the Davis fight to be at 135 – but none as high as which broadcaster will carry the fight.

"The television platform issue is a big one," said Taffet. "Mayweather Promotions is a key supplier to Showtime, and Golden Boy is a key supplier to DAZN with a big new deal in place recently. DAZN works hard to solidify its U.S. fan base, and having Ryan Garcia fight on another network would send tough signals to their subscribers. Showtime has participated in some of the biggest fights in the sport's history, so you have to believe they would stand strong on the network issue. And while from a distance some folks might think a fair solution would be for Showtime to air the first fight and DAZN to air a potential rematch, the odds going in to this fight favor Davis and potentially by KO, which might nullify a rematch or reduce its value, so it is a tough issue for both sides.

"At the end of the day, with Davis, Mayweather and Showtime on one side, I don't see them giving in on the network issue, and while money is a great equalizer in negotiations, I don't think Showtime/Mayweather would cede the necessary percentages to push Golden Boy and DAZN to concede."

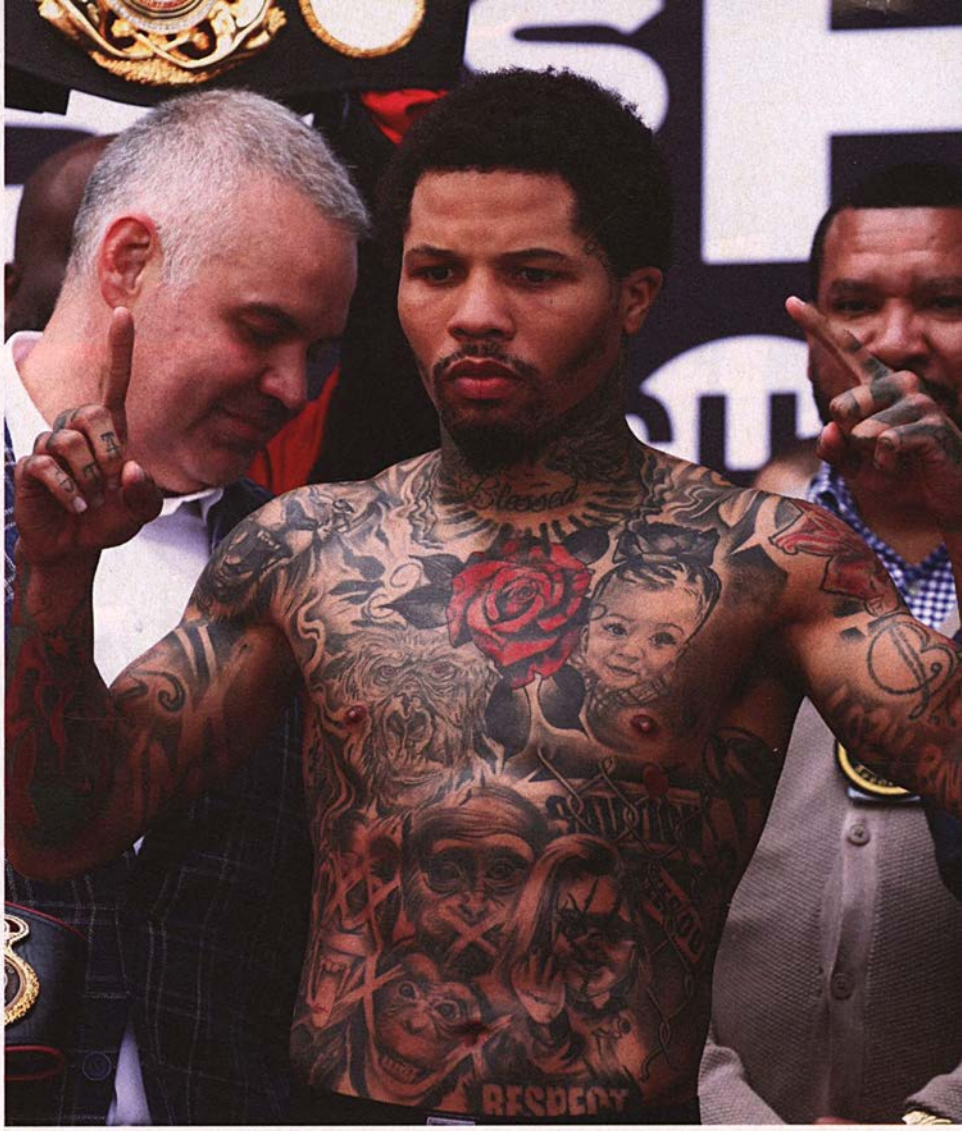
Money – when there's enough of it – usually brings boxing folks together, as Taffet alluded to, but the purse split is another potential negotiation block.

Mayweather has designated Garcia as the "B-side" of the potential promotion, while the CEO of Mayweather Promotions, Leonard Ellerbe, has taken to his Twitter account to point out that Davis has higher attendance numbers than Garcia and is already an established pay-per-view headliner.

However, without holding a major world title or ever headlining a PPV show, Garcia was paid the same $2 million purse that Davis was guaranteed for the Romero fight.

"I believe it would be tough for either side to accept less than 50 percent of the pie," said Taffet. "It will take some time for the financial splits to be agreed upon. It's not something that can be expected to be realized quickly. My guess is that if the fight happens, it won't be until 2023."

That might not be a bad thing for Garcia (23-0, 19 KOs), who is still fairly new to the world-class ranks. As Taffet mentioned, Garcia, who exhibited his potential and his vulnerability with an up-from-the-canvas stoppage of former title challenger Luke Campbell in January 2021, is a decided underdog against Davis (27-0, 25 KOs). Former matchmaker Jolene Mizzone, who developed fighters for Main Events, agrees with the oddsmakers.



Whatever Davis gives up in height, he'll make up for with intensity.

"This is a one-sided fight for Davis [if it happens this year]," said Mizzone, who now manages fighters. "Nothing against Ryan Garcia whatsoever, I just think that Davis is the much better fighter all around right now. My feeling is that Ryan is only 23 years old and if he fights Davis now, I think it would be a tough fight. Win or lose, it may not help Ryan's future."

Respected trainer and pundit Stephen "Breadman" Edwards agrees that Davis is the total package, but he still views Garcia as a threat even though the younger fighter (who turned 24 in August) is still proving himself.

MIKE STOBE

"It's a great matchup," Edwards said. "Davis is one of the five best punchers in boxing along with [Deontay] Wilder, [Artur] Beterbiev and [Naoya] Inoue. He can box, he has good stamina, he has a high IQ and he seems to take a good punch. He's among the 10 most talented fighters in the world. He doesn't have a great resume, but it's good enough to know what you're looking at.

"Garcia is the unknown commodity in this fight. We don't know what we have yet in him. But we do know he was a talented amateur. We know he has super-fast hands, concussive power and elite punch release.

"The issue with Garcia is we don't know if he's more Amir Khan [in terms of his defense and punch resistance] or Oscar De La Hoya. He seems to be a fighter who has a dead spot after he punches and he's waiting to be clipped.

"But Garcia has a great trainer in Joe Goossen, who could be the wild card in this fight. Along with Bernard Hopkins and Oscar De La Hoya mentoring [Garcia], he can correct his mistakes."

Kim believes Garcia's mistakes are what make the fight compelling, along with his considerable height advantage (5-foot-11 to Davis' 5-foot-5½) and Tank's habit of giving away rounds.

"It's an interesting matchup, given that Tank is a legitimate puncher, one that can change a fight in an instant," said Kim. "Garcia is a reflexive boxer who can strike like lightning with his counter left hook, but he's been dumped on the canvas by a southpaw (Campbell) in the past. When it comes to physical strength, Tank has the advantages. But at the same time, Ryan has the edge in length and reach, and we've seen Davis lose more than a few rounds versus lesser fighters."

While multi-division fighters such as Pedraza and Leo Santa Cruz may take offense to being called "lesser" than Garcia, they both won rounds before being stopped by Davis, as did the unrated and inexperienced Romero. Cruz won five rounds against Davis on two of the official scorecards.

"Davis loses rounds while he tries to figure out his opponent's rhythm," explained Edwards. "If Garcia gets out to an early lead, I can see him playing keep-away, which will cause Tank to press down the stretch. That would be high drama."

Or as Garcia put it:

"That's a fight you want to see – two young, strong, explosive athletes with speed going at it. We're not here to 'tap-tap' to a victory; we're here to catch you coming in and you get knocked out, that's for sure. [It will be] a dangerous chess match."

Davis hasn't engaged much with Garcia, who he probably suspects is clout-chasing, but he says their showdown can happen.

"I haven't been going back and forth with Ryan, because we all know he's not a man of his word," Davis stated on social media, "but I do know it's a possibility of the fight happening. So I'd rather stay quiet till the deal is locked. Nothing means anything now.

"We can make it happen ... It's already locked in if people do what's right."

What's right is open to each side's interpretation, so all involved will have to get creative if they're serious about doing business.

"The easiest solution is for the two television platforms to co-brand the live pay-per-view and share the delayed telecast," said Taffet. "But that type of arrangement is historically saved only for the biggest megafights, and Davis-Garcia is not a multi-million-buy PPV event."

Not yet.

Garcia has also proven his ability to stay focused on winning.

TOM HOGAN/GOLDEN BOY PROMOTIONS

WAITING BE DAMNED

WITH NEITHER ABLE TO LAND A STEPPING-STONE FIGHT AGAINST A RECLUSIVE TITLEHOLDER, AMERICAN STANDOUTS **MIKAELA MAYER** AND **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** ARE JUMPING STRAIGHT TO THE MAIN COURSE

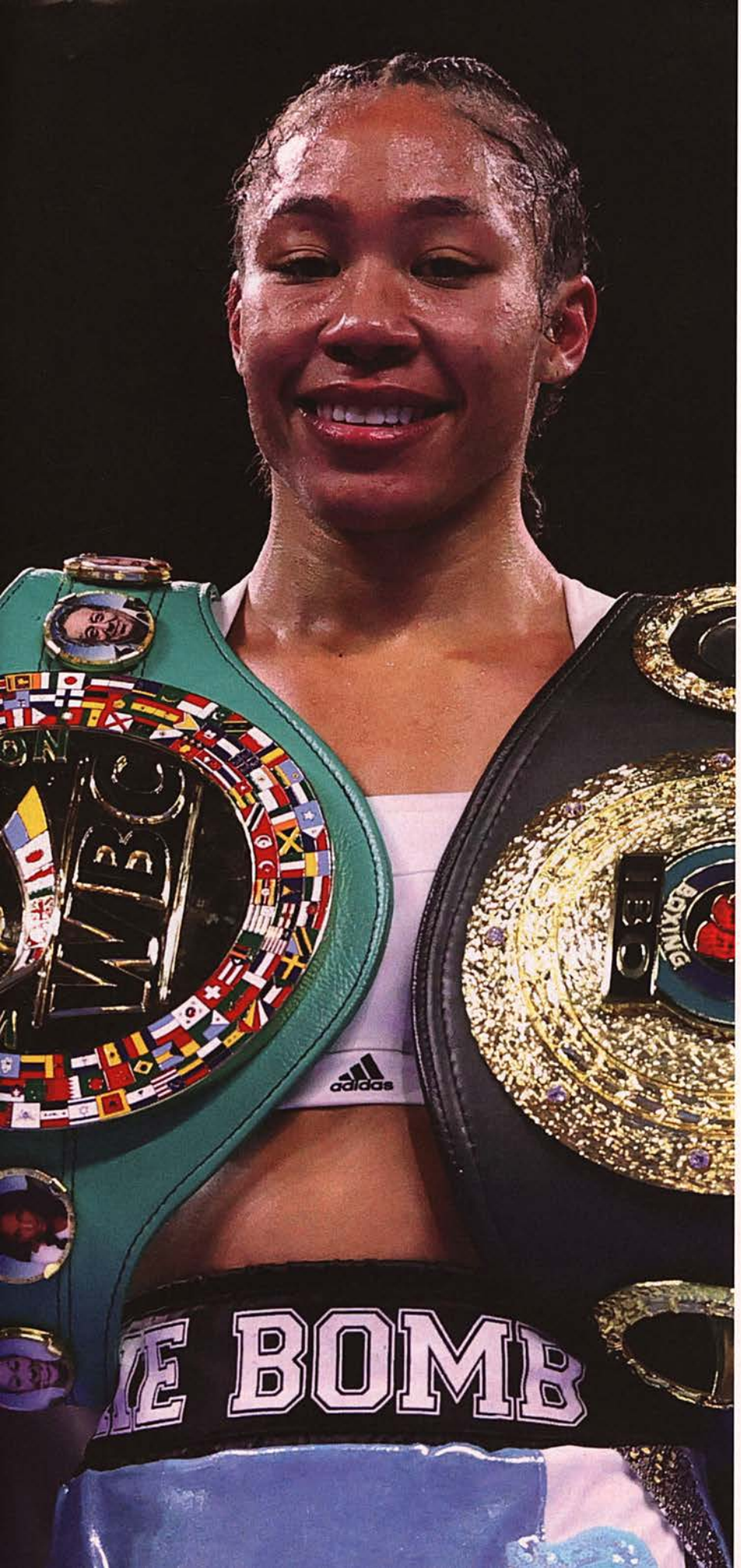
By **Thomas Gerbasi**

When it was announced in May that a junior lightweight unification superfight was agreed to by Ring/IBF/WBO champion Mikaela Mayer and WBC titleholder Alycia Baumgardner, boxing fans rejoiced. But the skeptical among us wondered what the catch was.

In the modern era of boxing, we are conditioned to wait. Let a fight marinate, they say. How did the best 130-pound fighters in the world decide to fight each other, then actually follow through with it mere months after they began jawing at each other on social media?

Thank the third member of the division's championship trio, Hyun Mi Choi.

Yes, a fighter who has held a world title since 2014 may be the reason why Mayer and Baumgardner will be throwing hands in the co-main event of the Claressa Shields-Savannah Marshall middleweight unification



card at The O2 Arena in London on September 10.

"They (Team Baumgardner) couldn't get the fight with Choi either," said Mayer. "Her team's impossible to work with. She needs to be stripped or she needs to vacate her belt and move on. It's ridiculous. She's the longest-reigning champion in boxing and she doesn't fight anyone."

Case in point, at press time: Choi was scheduled to face 3-0 Aka Ringo in South Korea on August 15. Meanwhile, after Mayer couldn't get a unification bout with Choi and neither could Baumgardner, the two took the biggest fight possible. Against each other. And given the high stakes and the place both hold in the sport, that was a shocker. But not to the fighters.

"I'm not [surprised], because I knew eventually something was gonna come up," said Baumgardner. "Either they were gonna offer it or we were gonna eventually get it, and we have definitely put pressure on Top Rank (Mayer's promoter) to make the fight as well. Because I was in a position where I didn't have to take that fight. But because it was offered and I knew that it was the time to take it, I was like, 'Why not? OK, we got the offer, let's take it.'"

That offer came on the heels of Mayer's third successful title defense, against Jennifer Han in April in her California backyard. A week later, Mayer was in the U.K. to do commentary while Baumgardner defended her crown against Edith Matthysse, and she was pulled to the side by Top Rank's Carl Moretti.

"Don't eat too much," said Moretti. "I'll be in touch with you soon."

"That gave me a little hope that something might be going on," said Mayer, who soon got the news she was hoping for. Again, it wasn't a surprise to the 2016 Olympian.

"Top Rank came with an offer she couldn't refuse, and props to them for stepping up and making it happen for me," said Mayer, who has gone from a raw talent to a seasoned pro and champion

since entering the punch-for-pay ranks in 2017. Not surprisingly, her confidence is sky-high, especially after beating the likes of Helen Joseph, Ewa Brodnicka, Erica Farias and Maiva Hamadouche. And from here on out, she only wants champions and big fights.

"I've been put in front of some great girls, world champions, former world champions, world title challengers – they've all had a lot of experience, and I've gotten through them," Mayer said. "I can credit Top Rank for that – they built me perfectly and gave me the right fights at the right time, and now I'm ready to go. I have all the experience I need, and this is the time that you let me off my leash, as Coach Al [Mitchell] would say. Now it's time for me to leave my legacy and give back to the fans and make the big fights happen. I have nothing to lose. I'd rather walk away from the sport knowing that I fought the best and did everything I could than have what-ifs."

The 32-year-old Mayer's mindset mix of hungry challenger and confident champion is an intriguing one, and when you add in her backstory, Olympic pedigree and marketability, she frankly didn't need this kind of dangerous fight. But she took it anyway. The same goes for the 28-year-old Baumgardner, whose road to the top was quite different from her opponent's.

Initially a hot prospect knocking everyone and their sister out, Michigan's Baumgardner soon ran into promotional issues when Evander Holyfield's company went out of business. Then came a split decision loss to Christina Linardatou that marred her perfect record in 2018 and a knee injury that kept her sidelined for more than a year and a half.

When she did return in August 2021, she had one decision victory over Vanessa Bradford before getting the opportunity to face Terri Harper in England for the WBC crown. It wasn't close, and in the fourth round, she scored a frightening standing knockout of Harper that would have gotten scarier had referee Mark Lyson not stepped in. Just like that, Baumgardner was a world champion, and that world embraced her. For a while, it seemed like every DAZN card had a Baumgardner sighting or the new champ on commentary duty, and she welcomed it all.

"I was under the radar just because of certain circumstances, but I knew that as long as I stayed consistent and I worked hard that my time was gonna come," Baumgardner said. "And when it did come, I was already prepared for it because of what I've already seen. I was able to see Mikaela become a world champion, Terri become a world champion, and I'm like, 'My time's gonna come.' And when it came, I was well-prepared, and I took it by the horns with two hands. And with everything that was happening with commentating and being here and being there, I was ready for this. This moment was going to happen for me."

But would she maintain that level of intensity against a lesser opponent like Matthysse in her first defense? That was the big question leading into the bout. The one person not questioning any of it was the one in the ring with gloves on.

In her most recent outing, Mayer was a dominant points winner over Jennifer Han.

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

"I understood the assignment; I understood what I had to do," Baumgardner said. "No matter who it was in front of me, I had to defend my title, and that's exactly what I did. It might not have been the best person, but it was someone who was a veteran. She's never been stopped before and that fight showed me that I can go the distance and win every round, so I definitely got experience from that. And this is boxing. I had some pressure because of the knockout against Terri Harper, but I said, 'You know what? Go in there like you did in the Harper fight and win. If the knockout comes, it comes.' I never looked for the knockout when I fought Terri. It just came. I learned a lot."

Spring title defenses secured, Mayer and Baumgardner now prepare for a late summer of anything but love in the ring, as this one not only has high stakes but a little bit – OK, a lot – of bad blood. For a taste, just look at Twitter. So where did all this animosity come from?

"For me, it's fun," said Baumgardner. "It's competition. I'm a competitor. To see someone who thinks they're better than me, to talk that they're better than me, that amps me up. When I wake up every morning, I'm looking forward to that fight and fighting someone who thinks they're better than me and that I'm going to beat. This is exciting; this is what gets me out of bed; this is what makes me train even harder. This is it. This is what tells what a world champion is. You can get the title, you can defend your title, but now you're fighting another world champion for her belt, and you're going to beat her."

"She seems to be taking this all really personally," counters Mayer. "When she first beat Terri Harper, I came for her right away, and that's because I wanted to unify. I wanted to become undisputed. The fight with Terri Harper got away because it took too long to make happen, so I came for Baumgardner immediately, and she just didn't like that. It really isn't personal to me, but it became personal with the back and forth. I'll be cool, calm and collected when I go in that ring. I don't know about her, though."

There are a lot of questions surrounding the bout, which always means this is one fight fans can't miss. Can Mayer take Baumgardner's punch? Is Baumgardner experienced enough to get past not just Mayer, but the wizardry of Al Mitchell? Will emotion cause a brawl, or can the fighters stay disciplined for 10 rounds?

On September 10, all questions will be answered, and in the most important year in women's boxing history, Mayer and Baumgardner get to write their chapter and look to steal the show from not only Shields and Marshall, but Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano.

"I was there at [Taylor-Serrano]," said Baumgardner. "The atmosphere was amazing, and I also did commentary, so as I'm sitting there and seeing how this fight turned out, 'I'm like, 'Wow, I'm next. The fight with Mayer and I is next.' I believe it's the next superfight, and I pictured myself that day fighting Mayer."

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

Baumgardner won her world title with a ruthless stoppage of Terri Harper.

FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE

TO ASSESS THE UPCOMING UNDISPUTED MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP FIGHT BETWEEN CLARESSA SHIELDS AND SAVANNAH MARSHALL, THE RING ASKED THE REAL EXPERTS

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

TOM DULAT

As the middleweight unification fight between Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC champion Claressa Shields and WBO titleholder Savannah Marshall approaches, social media, podcasts and message boards have been filled with breakdowns of the bout from every conceivable angle. But when everyone has an opinion, who do you believe?

How about the only two women to be in the ring with both combatants, WBA junior middleweight titleholder Hannah Rankin and 154-pound contender Femke Hermans? That's a good place to start.

Ask either Rankin or Hermans if they want a shot at the winner of the September 10 superfight at The O2 Arena in London, and both make it clear that they're staying in the junior middleweight division for the foreseeable future.

That's the reality check of all reality checks, the fact that at some point, a fighter won't be big enough to compete in a certain division. And though Hermans went 10 rounds with Shields in December 2018 and Rankin did the same a month earlier, both losing decisions, it was when they got in with a rangy 5-foot-11 puncher in Marshall that the idea of sticking around at middleweight faded away.

"I also fought Elin Cederroos, but I think Marshall is the hardest puncher I ever fought with, in training and in fights," said Hermans. "She has a real punch and she throws big shots at you. She plays around, but when she hits you, she's hitting at one hundred percent, and she commits to every shot she takes. And because she uses her length, every shot counts and you have to be careful with her."

Rankin had a similar experience with the Hartlepool native, suffering through plenty of adversity before getting halted in the seventh round.

"I would definitely say she's the hardest puncher I've faced in the ring," said Rankin. "She's big for middleweight – she just makes it – and she's very tall for the weight as well. She's a heavy puncher, but when I fought her, I perforated my eardrum at the beginning of the fourth round, which really upset my balance, and it meant that I was in the wrong place at the wrong time and I broke my jaw. But I feel that if that hadn't happened to me at that point, [the result] wouldn't have been the case. All these things happen in a fight and you've got to deal with it. But she's a big puncher, especially if you stay at range with her."

Marshall is also the only person to beat Shields in a boxing ring, defeating the two-time Olympic gold medalist in a 2012 amateur bout, and she will have the home field advantage fighting in London. Neither Rankin nor Hermans believes the amateur bout will have any bearing on September's result, and surprisingly, they both see Marshall fighting close to home as much ado about nothing.

"Even when I fought Marshall, if they're shouting for you or against you, it gives you a vibe going into the ring," said Hermans. "I don't think there is a real advantage."

"Claressa really doesn't care," adds Rankin. "To her, it's almost more satisfying to beat [Marshall] in her own backyard. So I think it's firing her up more, and I'm not actually sure that the home advantage is anything that's gonna make much of a difference, really. Obviously, Savannah will be confident being at home, but Claressa won a gold medal in the Olympics in London, so she feels like it's home and she loves being in the U.K. She's got a big fan base here, and I think this is a fight that everybody is so excited about. It's a real 50-50 fight."

So how does Shields win if, at 5-foot-8, she's giving up size, and power, to her rival, and may face judges susceptible to a crowd roaring for Marshall?

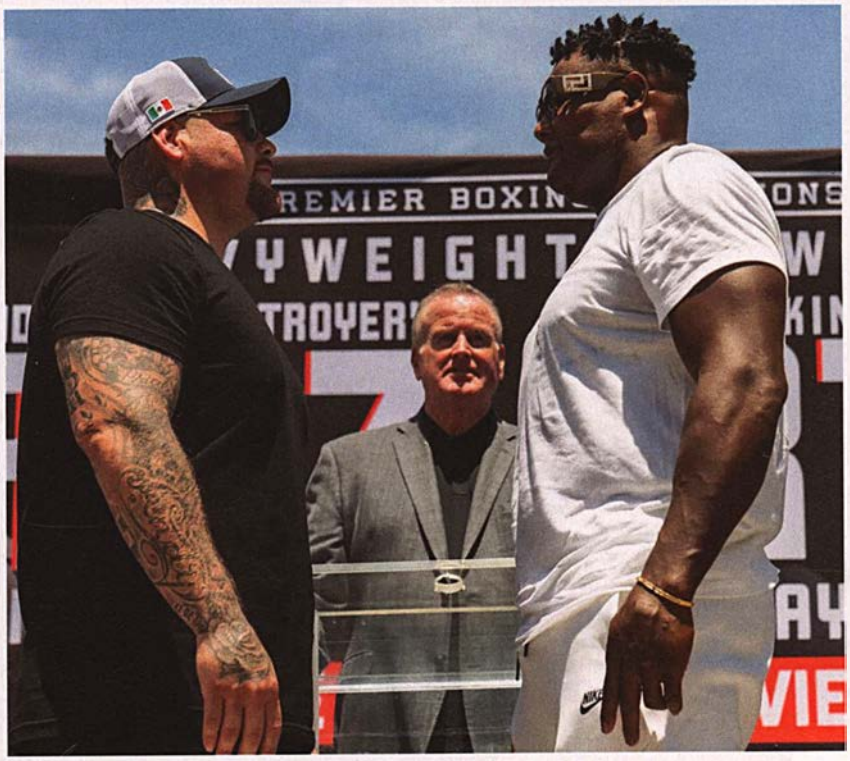
"Her best chance is to outbox Marshall, to use her speed and work on going in and out every time," said Hermans, who believes Shields will have to learn to deal with the unique style Marshall has developed from working with coach Peter Fury. "With [Christina] Hammer, in the beginning, [Shields] worked on the counters and let [Hammer] try to hit and come back then. But that's difficult with Marshall, because Marshall fights without defense. It's the Fury way. Her hands are never next to her head in defense. She's coming from left and right. For me, Marshall is one of the most complete fighters with the girls. With technique, there will be better boxers, but the skills that she has and the height and the speed, I think Shields will need to outbox her – to go for the counter, go in, go out – and put speed into the fight."

"I think there's two aspects to it for me," Rankin said. "Claressa is full-on in the lead-up to a fight with the mental games and how confident she is. She believes in herself, and when we had the lead-up to our fight, we didn't like each other. There was a lot of trash talking going on, and that's quite a lot of pressure for Savannah because she's usually quite quiet and usually doesn't say much. I'm sure Claressa will be on it from the very beginning, and she has been, so the mental side of it is quite a big part of it; it all depends on how well Savannah actually deals with that. And then secondly, I think Claressa's the better boxer with the better skill set. Some people think she's quite flat-footed, but actually she's got a great awareness of distance, timing and speed, and her combination punches are really good. So she might not be that one-punch knockout artist, but if she gets inside on Savannah, I feel that this could cause many problems, because [Savannah is] not that good on the inside and that's where Claressa's gonna want to be. [Claressa is] not gonna want to hang out at the end of those punches."

The experts have spoken, but while the end result of the fight remains a mystery, what is not up for debate is that Shields vs. Marshall is going to be one to remember.

BOXEO SUPREMO: On June 21, 1980, the great Salvador Sanchez (right) scored a repeat triumph over Danny Lopez to retain the Ring and WBC featherweight titles at the Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion in Las Vegas. This battle of future Hall of Famers was more competitive than their first encounter four months earlier in Phoenix, Arizona. In that fight, Sanchez dominated "Little Red" to claim the championship via 13th-round stoppage. The Mexican star made one defense – a convincing decision win over Ruben Castillo – before reasserting himself against Lopez in the rematch. The great former champ gave it everything in pursuit of revenge, but Sanchez's adept defense and counterpunching savvy kept him a step ahead. In Round 14, a sudden and brutal assault at mid-ring rendered Lopez helpless, and he was immediately rescued by referee Mills Lane.

COMING UP



A heavyweight crossroads clash between former unified titleholder Andy Ruiz and Luis Ortiz is set for Sept. 4 in Los Angeles.

AUGUST

AUG. 20 – Oleksandr Usyk vs. Anthony Joshua, heavyweights (for Usyk's IBF/WBA/WBO titles), Saudi Arabia (DAZN). Also, Callum Smith vs. Mathieu Bauderlique, light heavyweights; Filip Hrgovic vs. Zhilei Zhang, heavyweights.

AUG. 20 – Adrien Broner vs. Omar Figueroa Jr., junior welterweights, Hollywood, Florida (Showtime). Also, Roger Gutierrez vs. Hector Garcia, junior lightweights (for Gutierrez's WBA title).

AUG. 20 – Emanuel Navarrete vs. Eduardo Baez, featherweights (for Navarrete's WBO title), San Diego (ESPN/ESPN+).

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 4 – Andy Ruiz vs. Luis Ortiz, heavyweights, Los Angeles (Fox PPV).

SEPT. 8 – Yokasta Valle vs. Thi Thu Nhi Nguyen, strawweights (for Valle's IBF and Nguyen's WBO titles), Hatillo, Costa Rica (DAZN).

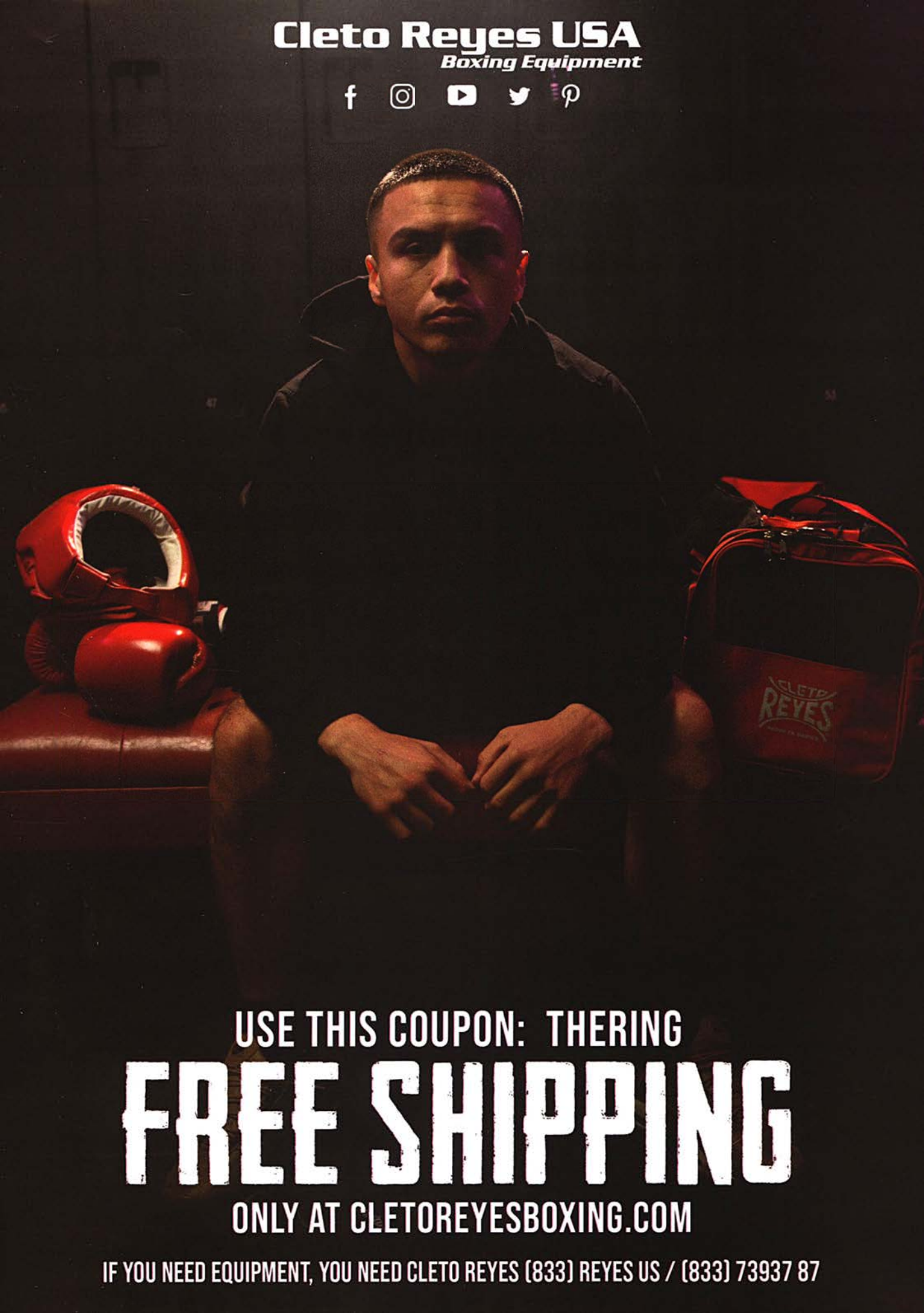
SEPT. 10 – Claressa Shields vs. Savannah Marshall, middleweights (for Shields' Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC and Marshall's WBO titles), London (ESPN+). Also, Mikaela Mayer vs. Alycia Baumgardner, junior lightweights (for Mayer's Ring/IBF/WBO and Baumgardner's WBC titles).

SEPT. 17 – Canelo Alvarez vs. Gennadiy Golovkin, super middleweights (for Canelo's undisputed championship), Las Vegas (DAZN). Also, Jesse Rodriguez vs. Israel Gonzalez, junior bantamweights (for Rodriguez's WBC title).

SEPT. 23 – Shakur Stevenson vs. Robson Conceicao, junior lightweights (for Stevenson's Ring/WBC/WBO titles), Newark, N.J. (ESPN).

OCTOBER

OCT. 16 – Devin Haney vs. George Kambosos Jr., lightweights (for Haney's undisputed championship), Melbourne, Australia (ESPN/ESPN+).



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